University of Alberta

Overhearing Dionne Brand:
Genre and the Organic Intellectual Project

by

Brendan John Wild ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of English

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17 January 2003

"THROUGH MY IMPERFECT MOUTH AND LIFE AND WAY" XIV I

I know you don't like poems, especially mine
and especially since mine never get told when
you need them, and I know that I live some
inner life that thinks it's living outside but
isn't and only wakes up when something knocks
too hard and when something is gone as if gazing
up the road I miss the bus and wave a poem at
its shadow. But bus and shadow exist all the same
and I'll send you more poems even if they arrive
late. What stops us from meeting at this place
and imagining ourselves big as the world and broad
enough to take it in and grow ancient is fear and
our carelessness, and standing in the thrall
of the wicked place we live in and not seeing
a way out all the time and never clearly all at once
and not at the same time and abandoning each other
to chance and small decisions, but if I ever thought
that I could never recover the thought of struggling
to live through my imperfect mouth and life and way,
if I thought that I could do nothing about the world
then … well, and we've hung on to old hurts as if
that was all there was and as if no amount of sadness
would be enough for our old, insistent,
not becoming selves; and as if sadness should not end,
so for this I'll send you more poems even if they
only wave and even if I only look up late to see
your shadow rushing by.

~Dionne Brand, *Land to Light On* (81)

University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommended to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Overhearing Dionne Brand: Genre and the Organic Intellectual Project" in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

This study is the first to consider the full breadth of Dionne Brand's oeuvre as constituting the articulation of an organic intellectual project directed towards the exploration of the socio-economic and -political constraints that have long stymied the lives of Black women in Canada. Brand's many works operate as critical interventions in the Canadian social-cultural matrix that traditionally masks and elides the specificities that epitomize the presence and herstory of Black women.

Central to this dissertation is an exploration of the array of genres Brand deploys. Her works, in the forms of documentary film, oral herstory, sociological essays, fiction, poetry, and non-fiction essays, functions—provocatively and pragmatically—as media suitable to broadcast to diverse audiences the theoretical and practical insights, and activist agendas, of Black female organic intellectuals. The immediacy and the power of visual representation in film, the compelling nature of oral herstory, the pedagogical and instructive capacity of sociological essays, the sustained imaginative immersion that fiction affords, the sensuous linguistic intensity and precision of poetry, and the associative logic that essays exploit: such are the principal strengths of Brand's multi-generic contributions. Brand's utilization of the distinct communicative and representative potential of each genre's inherent linguistic register works to intervene in, and disrupt, the silence that has traditionally shrouded the presence and voices of Black women in Canada.

Antonio Gramsci's conception of the organic intellectual, as one who facilitates the articulation and refinement of wisdom engendered by a subaltern population's material experience, establishes the ideological framework within which to deliberate

Brand's role as a proponent and champion of gynocentric perspectives on the relations of race, gender, production, and class. Brand's outing of Black herstory, frequently in the language and voices of the individuals who have helped to direct Black women's aspirations, in the context of Canada's Black Power movement or the women's movement of the late 1960s and early 1970s, brings to light material vital to the construction of an alternative reading of Black women's roles in this nation's development and makeup.

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For her assistance with the acquisition of the Women at the Well film proposals (submitted to the National Film Board of Canada (NFB)) and with other relevant materials, I thank former Studio D Executive Produce Ginny Stikeman. My thanks also to NFB archivist Bernard Lutz, who was instrumental in providing me with film transcripts.

I would like to thank my committee members, George Lang, Cecily Devereux, Colleen Skidmore, and Carol Morrell, for their careful and thoughtful readings of this document and for the many suggestions they made so that I might improve its clarity, accuracy, and its scholarly integrity.

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Dionne Brand was generous with her time during our conversation in January 2002, while she was the Ruth Wynn Woodward Professor in the Department of Women's Studies at Simon Fraser University. Her comments and clarification were invaluable to this project. Her generosity, charm, and humour are remarkable complements to the fire of her writing, and the ironclad resolve of her commitment to a full humanity.

All shortcomings and errors in this document remain solely my responsibility.

Grappling with a dissertation does nothing if not test the mettle and depth of relationships:

For her put-one-foot-ahead-the-other organizational abilities, and her unwavering certainty that completion was simply a matter of time, my thanks to Alanna Fero, professional coach extraordinaire.

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TITLE ABBREVIATIONS

A Map to the Door of No Return (*MDR*)

At the Full and Change of the Moon (*FCM*)

Bread Out of Stone: Recollections on Sex, Recognitions, Race, Dreaming, and Politics (*BOS*)

Chronicles of the Hostile Sun (*CHS*)

'Fore Day Morning (*FDM*)

In Another Place, Not Here (*IAP*)

Land to Light On (*LLO*)

Listening for Something...Adrienne Rich and Dionne Brand in Conversation (*LS*)

Long Time Comin' (*LTC*)

No Burden to Carry: Narratives of Black Working Women in Ontario 1920s to 1950s (*NBC*)

No Language Is Neutral (*NLN*)

Older Stronger Wiser (*OSW*)

Rivers Have Sources, Trees Have Roots: Speaking of Racism (*RHS*)

Sisters in the Struggle (*SS*)

"We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up": Essays in African Canadian Women's History (*WRH*)

Winter Epigrams and Epigrams for Ernesto Cardenal in Defense of Claudia (*WE* and *EEC*)

Introduction

Overhearing Dionne Brand

> An interviewer on the CBC asks me: "Isn't it a burden to have to write about being Black?" What else would I write about? What would be more important? Since these things are inseparable, and since I do not wish to be separated from them, I take on the responsibility of defending them. I have a choice in this.
>
> ~ Dionne Brand, "Bread Out of Stone"

The writings of Dionne Brand provide Canada with some of its most passionate and outspoken critical articulations on the subjects of this nation's historical links with and institutional underwriting of racism, sexism, and capitalism, particularly as these elements are mobilized to establish and reinforce class barriers. The critiques Brand formulates of racist and patriarchal forces operative in Canada's informal social hierarchies, and of the hegemonic forces that shape cultural, economic, and social institutions, underscore their ongoing manifestations and deployment to maintain privilege for white Canadians and immigrants at the expense of Canadians and immigrants of non-white races. For many people of colour, Brand asserts, a significant consequence of such racism is a distinct and chronic sense of oneself as occupying "immigrant" status, a perception that effectively obstructs the intrinsic sense of equality and permanency commensurate with full and equal citizenship.[1] For many Black women,[2] restricted educational and employment opportunities, conjoined with the effects of a characteristically wily variety of Canadian racism, preclude the possibility of obtaining what Brand calls "[r]eal power—which is economic power and political power" (Novak 274)—and thereby inhibit that sense of individual and collective agency so necessary within a national framework. Individual agency is essential to counteract the constant affronts, generated by individuals and systems, to one's personal integrity and the right to occupy one's place in local social space; simultaneously, collective agency is indispensable to the identification, (re)construction, and sustainment of a record of collective social struggle that is often omitted from the incantations of Canada's dominant nation-narratives. The agency of subalterns, individual and collective, is necessary to survive and positively transform conditions of oppressive inequality.

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[1] Speaking in 1990 of her own experience as a person of colour in Canada, Brand says, "You know, I've been living in this country for twenty years. I am sure there's a guy who emigrated from England five years ago who feels more [a part] of this country than I. And I'm sure that there's a black person who has lived here for 150 years and feels like me" (Novak 275).

The power and poignancy of Brand's writing on racism and sexism, in addition to the moral authority with which her prose works, poetry, and fiction compellingly resonate, are indicative of a body of work that is the intimate partner of lived, material experience—experience that gives rise to subject formation through language as the medium of individual and cultural identity. A Marxist conception of art as a mode or practice of social critique, as a vehicle for change, binds Brand's work to political praxis. This social impulse is also a substantive, traditional component of the African and

---

[2] Except where the referent *black* appears in lowercase, within a citation, I have, out of respect for Brand's consistent capitalization of the word, followed her example. Brand and Sri Bhaggiyadatta outline the rationale behind their decision to capitalize this signifier in the "Author's [sic] Notes" of *Rivers Have Sources, Trees Have Roots*: "[T]he word 'Black' has been given an initial capital to stress a common heritage, a cultural and personal identity proudly claimed by Black people" (iii).

African American tradition of the artist.[3] In interview with Makeda Silvera, Brand glosses the political orientation that directs her focus when she remarks, "I've always been a leftist from the time I came into any kind of political consciousness. And I don't mean leftist in terms of airy ideas or something like that, but a leftist in terms of concrete work" ("In the Company" 356). She continues: "I don't see Marxism and feminism as theories I need to graft onto people, I see them as living things.... I still think there is a need for a socialist vision. And I honestly do not mind saying that that is what my work is about. I think that is where my work differs—in its explicitness about that idea" (357). In keeping with the feminist and Marxist traditions she resolutely adheres to as both writer and social activist, Brand's critical and artistic expression draws from the specificity and complexity of the discourses through which lived encounters are negotiated and by which they are bound. Her works participate in signifying discourses that contest the discursive structures that organize the exclusion of Blacks and peoples of colour from mainstream Canadian social and economic systems, ideologies that preclude them from social equality. Such oppositional discourse serves as an instrument of and medium for self-preservation for those culturally marginalized groups with whom she allies herself. As one such constituency, it is to Black women that Brand commits her considerable energies when she generates this oppositional discourse.

The underlying objective of this dissertation is to elucidate two projects that organize Brand's oeuvre. Her first project is to make visible the hegemonic conditions that affect Black people in an Anglo-centric nation-culture that has historically elided the presence and history of Black people in Canada. The practical effect of this elision has been the eclipse of information about Blacks in Canada and, more specifically, information about the socio-economic forces mobilized to maintain Blacks in subaltern positions, particularly positions subservient to white-controlled capitalist agendas. The second project of Brand's oeuvre may be seen as a subset of the first: it is constituted by a feminist-materialist analysis of circumstances and conditions that characterize Black women's herstory,[4] differentiating it from Black male history. As I will show, issues of economic and political disenfranchisement specific to Black women have been subordinated, under the pretext of cohesiveness and political pragmatism, by a Black male political agenda bent principally on securing Black androcentric civil rights and equality in Canada. Although the second component of Brand's project may be a subset of the first, it is nevertheless the sine qua non of Brand's work.

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[3] See H. Nigel Thomas's comments on the social component of the tradition of the African artist in "A Commentary on the Poetry of Dionne Brand," *Kola: A Black Literary Magazine* 1.1 (Winter 1987), 52.

Educating Absence

Consistent throughout her experience of the Trinidadian and Canadian educational systems, Brand's engagement with written discourse was marred by the absence of

---

[4] Feminism materialism is a feminist-nuanced outgrowth of historical materialism. In "Materialist Feminism in the Postmodern Academy: Toward a Global Social Analytic," Rosemary Hennessy writes on this subject: "'[T]he social' as a category of knowledge historically contributes to the production of material life. This assertion assumes a particular problematic—historical materialism—in which 'the social' as a way of structuring how we make sense of the world is understood as ideology" (14). Materialist feminism brings to bear on historical materialism "the interestedness and potential collective power posed by feminism as a critique of the systemic inequities wrought by capitalist patriarchy" (12). The importance and informative capacity of materialist feminism, as with most theory, lies in the fact that "[a]s a critical practice, theory issues from the cracks and seams in the coherence of a culture's regimes of truth, forcing the system of knowledge out of its 'proper' disciplinary boundaries, and inquiring into the conditions of possibility that define them" (8).

Blacks from those texts, including her presence. She writes, "all my life, from colonial dame school to post-graduate work in North America, from 'see Dick run' to Habermas, I had been forced to read and learn about white people" (*NBC* 28–29). Her compulsion to develop an oppositional discourse that provides for the inclusion of Black reality derives from the fact that, as she observes,

> within that writing there was never my presence.... That writing was predicated on imperial history and imperial aspirations—British or American. That imperial history included black slavery. It included the decimation of native peoples. And if the literature nurtured on this is presented to you as great art and you are absent, or the forms or shapes in which you are included are derided, then you know that this literature means to erase you or to kill you. Then you write yourself. (Novak 273)

This admonition to "write yourself" is an axiom that informs Brand's poetic, scholarly, and social writings at their most instinctual and pragmatic levels as they work to address the scarcity of individual and collective autochthonous herstorical representations of Blacks. Brand's advocacy of this maxim effectively locates her within Barbara Christian's category of "folk who speak in muted tones ... people of color, feminists, radical critics, creative writers ... for whom literature is not an occasion for discourse among critics but is necessary nourishment for their people and one way by which they come to understand their lives better" (53). Brand, in her work, strives to enable the articulation of particularist, individual circumstances, and the analysis of the overarching hegemonic operations that determine those circumstances.

Correspondent with the absence of a generic Black presence in literature and other forms of socio-cultural representation, the historical contributions of Black women in Canada have been subjected to a particularly thorough elision within this country's historical, social, and artistic ledgers. Where there is Black presence, it is often the subject of negative distortion, while specific obstacles and concerns are obscured Brand glosses this exclusion in the eponymous introductory essay of *No Burden to Carry: Narratives of Black Working Women in Ontario 1920s to 1950s*: "If Black life in Canada as a whole has been absent from the works of Canadian scholars, or inadequately served by them, Black women's lives have been doubly hidden." She asserts: "Within existing accounts, Black peoples are taken as a genderless group" (12). Among the compromising effects of this reductive Eurocentric and androcentric bias in scholarship is the failure to distinguish the specificities of Black herstory from Black history, in particular the abuses and stresses to which women were and are subject as the combined effect of their racialization and gender construction. The outcome, Brand argues, is that Canadian history "conflates all of Black history into the history of men doing things" (12). The commonplace silence around the herstory of Black women, with exceptions made for exemplary individuals who garner popular attention—often due more to their race than their gender—is indicative of Black women's subordinate social position and reduced economic power within a matrix of Western, typically patriarchal, hierarchies.[5] "I take the position," Brand writes, "that Black history has tended to excise the place of Black women in it" (13). This remains true even when the exclusion of women's particularist herstory is detrimental to an accurate representation or interpretation of the history of Blacks in Canada overall; it remains true even when its inclusion would broaden the general call for improved socio-economic inclusion.

---

[5] Brand draws attention to the figures of Mary Ann Shadd Cary (a teacher, and a publisher of anti-slavery works, including her own newspaper (the *Provincial Freeman*), who lived in Ontario from 1851 to 1862), and the iconic American abolitionist Harriet Tubman (*ca* 1820–1913). For a sampling of the experiences of Black women whose involvement in the underground railroad brought them to Canada, see Adrienne Shadd's "'The Lord seemed to say "Go"': Women and the Underground Railroad Movement" in

Brand's non-fiction works effectively make more visible and accessible the historical records of particular constituencies within the Black population; they also critique the current hegemonic conditions that affect that population. Because of her political affiliations, Brand's work is directed to the ear of a specific readership. In conversation with Adrienne Rich, Brand states unambiguously who it is she directs her poetry toward: "Concretely, what I think I'm doing when I am writing poetry is I think I am speaking to Black people" (*LS* 432).[6] While I take Brand's reflection seriously, I believe it is vital to emphasize the critical focus implicated in her subsequent assertion: that is, "in terms of crafting that line, I must speak to the hearer: and the hearer I've identified, the task I've identified, is this hearer who must hear it out of the history of colonialism and slavery, and [a] continued kind of oppression in the world as we know it today." The "oppression" she speaks of, and that which her poetry addresses, I propose, is principally that "known" by Black women. (Although Brand does cast her net more broadly in her later, extended works of non-fiction, including *Bread Out of Stone* and *A Map to the Door of No Return*, and in her second novel, *At the Full and Change of the*

Peggy Bristow, et al, *"We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up": Essays in African Canadian Women's History* (Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1994) : 41–68.

[6] Page numbers for citations that refer to Brand's four films correspond to page numbers in "Appendix A: Dionne Brand Films Transcripts," which appears at the end of this dissertation.

Moon). Although Brand's comments are sometimes ambivalent, the often emphatic reiteration of her disinterest in men (Black or otherwise) is manifest throughout her work and points to Black women as her particular "hearer[s]." I understand Brand's analytical and literary undertakings to be directed by the critical awareness of, and the drive to correct, this exclusion of the specificities of Black women's voices and herstories from Canadian historical and social records. Brand states her objective unequivocally in "No Burden to Carry":

> These missing elements led me to work on the precise social construction of Black women's lives, the ways in which we live every day, our place in the political, economic and social structures and to an undertaking in oral history. My method developed out of a certainty that there must be something else to tell.... My purpose is to unchain these histories from the genderless bundle of information and misinformation on 'Blacks,' both by outside groups (whites) and inside groups (Blacks). (*NBC* 30)

Accessing directly Black women's herstories, by way of oral herstory, Brand draws attention to the details of those experiences and to their distinct circumstances. The end result is the recuperation of Black women's herstory from critical displacement by a monolithic category of Black History.

The failure to credit women individually and collectively with social, economic, and political efficacy—without simultaneous acknowledgement of the systemic prejudice levelled against them because of their gender, and as a consequence of the historical context within which they have operated—is to defraud them of their agency; it is also to deprive the historical record, and those who would draw examples from it, of effectual models for women's engagement with the framework of their material conditions.

Brand's specific interest in the conditions, herstories, and aspirations of Black women must be attributed, in part, to her lesbianism. The formulation of her project derives from what she describes to Makeda Silvera as "lesbian consciousness" ("In the Company" 358). Lesbian consciousness, Brand proposes, envisions, and aims to fulfil, a female subjectivity that differentiates itself from patriarchal models of woman and womanhood, historical and social models like those conceived of in the monolithic Black History that Brand works so diligently to disrupt. The ideology that defines lesbian consciousness is one that rejects the subordination of the material, psychosocial, and herstorical elements of women's lives to male-determined constructs and valuations. Brand is fervent in her determination to contextualize the issues central to the material well-being and socio-economic parity of women, and Black women in particular.

The working writer

Though I have identified Brand's oeuvre as the outcome of projects designed to (1) make visible the hegemonic conditions that affect Black people in Eurocentric Canadian nation-culture, and (2) develop a feminist-materialist analysis of Black women's herstory in this country, the further purpose of this dissertation is to demonstrate that as a working writer who undertakes these projects, Brand functions in the role of the organic intellectual as identified by Antonio Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks*. "'Organic' intellectuals," Hoare and Smith summarize, are "the thinking and organising element of a particular fundamental social class. These organic intellectuals are distinguished less by their profession, which may be any job characteristic of their class, than by their function in directing the ideas and aspirations of the class to which they organically belong" ("The Intellectuals" 3). Leonardo Salamini explains that Gramsci identifies three types of classes, among which the "[f]undamental classes are those which exercise cultural, political and juridical hegemony over the entire society" (Salamini 80). Clearly, Black women in Canada do not constitute a fundamental class; nevertheless, in the interests of security, self-preservation, and well-being, it is towards establishing a fundamental class that all social factions strive. As a working writer, then, in this instance, Brand performs the social and political functions that make coherent—that is, allow to be "heard"—the voices of a select Black population, the voices of women (predominantly) otherwise excluded from the greater Canadian historical record and, not infrequently, expunged from Canada's historical and social consciousness. As an academic and a social activist, Brand possesses knowledge and skills that empower her to undertake multiform advocacy projects in order to elicit critical self-consciousness within this group or class of individuals.

It is by way of over thirty years sustained effort to identify, articulate, and promulgate "the precise social construction of Black women's lives, … [their] place in the political, economic and social structures" of Canada, that Brand has come to embody the organic intellectual (*NBC* 30). To invoke this concept as the framework within which to engage an examination of Brand's work throws into relief several features of her commitment to Black women, methods integral to her modus operandi, that distinguish her as an author of partisan historical, sociological, and literary texts. Indeed, it is valuable to interrogate the particular contributions Brand has made to the populations with whom she works and to whom she directs her writing.

By virtue of race and gender, of course, Brand is part of the general population of Canadian Black women. She is distinguished within this constituency, however, as a consequence of her professional attachments to academic institutions—Brand has taught or lectured at several Canadian universities, including the universities of Toronto, Guelph, Calgary, and British Columbia, and more recently at York and Simon Fraser universities[7]—and her personal intersections with intellectual communities that facilitate the modes of critique—Toronto's Black Women's Collective (BWC) for example—she brings to bear on the dominant systems that structure racism, class, and patriarchy.[8] This is not to suggest that Brand's formal education is solely or uniquely responsible for enabling her capacity as a social activist, feminist critic, or author: her well-honed intellectual ability and keen analytical bent is conspicuously evident in her autobiographical writings as well as the interviews she takes part in. Nonetheless, Brand's familiarity with and ability to access academic and government sources of financial support, in the service of funding research, are skills crucial to a social activist committed to advocate for the concerns of a certain population. Also important is her acquaintance with established systems of dissemination, such as empathetic presses and the now defunct alternative-content division of the Canadian National Film Board, Studio D.

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[7] For more details see, at the end of this document, "Appendix B: A Dionne Brand Chronology."

[8] For perspective on Brand's shared positioning with Claire Harris and M. Nourbese Philip, see George Elliot Clarke's "Harris, Philip, Brand: Three Authors in Search of Literate Criticism," *Journal of Canadian Studies / Revue d'etudes canadiennes* 35.1 (Spring 2000) : 161–89.

As Ross Chambers points out, "exclusion from the powerful discursive positions of 'preexisting,' [sic] socially derived authority (the media, including print; the professions, including in particular the profession of politics…)," affects many in disenfranchised, persecuted, and suppressed constituencies (4). Chambers writes: "In contemporary North America," where many individuals are included in one if not more such categories, "the practice of 'piggybacking' is widespread and well recognized—I mean the (characteristically oppositional) tactic whereby membership of a relatively privileged group can be used as a discursive base to speak of and from the situation of underprivilege (the black Lesbian using hard-won middle-class status [for example]…)." Brand's location within academia—often as writer in residence, and as a highly regarded, Governor General's Award-winning author—positions her within "privileged" company. Her thorough analysis of how past and current hegemonic structures were and are deployed to atomize, delegitimate, and conceal the socio-economic priorities of Black women in Canada distinguishes her in a concrete way from the broader constituency of Black women she aims to foster and the Canadian population in at large.

Brand occupies a position that bears certain privilege, insofar as there is a power intrinsic to her research, writing, and publication practices. There should be no question, however, about Brand's framing of the influence she wields as not only derivative of the advances secured by the everyday women and organizers who have preceded her, but also as working in the service of contemporary Black women so they can achieve their own social advances.

Critical self-consciousness

In order to unpack the substance of the concept of critical self-consciousness, it is helpful to turn first to Gramsci's thoughts on the need to organize—and hence the necessity of an organizer—in order to alter a given group's material conditions. "Critical self-consciousness means, historically and politically, the creation of an *élite* of intellectuals," writes Gramsci.[9] "A human mass does not 'distinguish' itself, does not become independent in its own right without, in the widest sense, organising itself; and there is no organisation without intellectuals, that is[,] without organisers and leaders" (*Prison* 334). In Gramsci's construction, the intellectual serves as the organic link, the intermediary, between the masses and the party; she serves in a dialectical role as the interpreter of the particularist requirements and perspectives of the masses for the organizing *élite*— the "party"—and, simultaneously, as the mediator and explicator of abstracted knowledge and theory that passes from the party to the masses. Based on Gramsci's supposition that "[t]he popular element 'feels' but does not always know or understand; [while] the intellectual element 'knows' but does not always understand and in particular does not always feel," the organic intellectual is an essential conduit in bringing together these two social bodies (*Prison* 418). Thus situated, the organic intellectual assists in the realization of a "[c]ultural unity, that is, unity of high and popular culture, [which] is not achieved through a systemic exposition of a conception of the world, but through a dialectical contact between the intellectuals and the masses" (Salamini 96).

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[9] In light of the potential for the term "*elite*" to appear the very opposite of egalitarian, Hoare and Smith make clear that "[t]he *élite*" as Gramsci makes use of the word, represents "the revolutionary vanguard of a social class in constant contact with its political and intellectual base" (*Prison* 334, n. 18).

What is "felt" by the people are the small frustrations and sense of general alienation produced by cultural, social, and political exclusion, by the marginalization of members of the subaltern group. On the other hand, what is "known" to intellectuals are the means by which a hegemonic class, through the deployment of ideological precepts and the cultivation of a seemingly coherent, reductive, "common-sense" understanding of material conditions, manages to maintain its position of class dominance; moreover, the intellectuals "know" the processes by which a subaltern group can move toward its own cultural and political autonomy, toward establishing itself as a fundamental class. (The phenomenon of "common sense," the lowest order of knowledge as it is calcified in kernels of popular wisdom, is examined in more detail below.) Salamini, writing in *The Sociology of Political Praxis: An Introduction to Gramsci's Theory*, explains this dialectical process in the following way: "The masses provide the necessary feelings, sentiments and passion for action; they [the feelings] are in turn transformed by the intellectuals into comprehension and knowledge and become practical activity through the party's direction" (67). It is in this process of transformation that much of Brand's oeuvre manifests especial resonance.

Most Black working-class women cannot fail to be cognizant of the ways in which the relations of production operate at their material expense. However, the constraints endemic in a working-class lifestyle—compromised educational opportunities, and scarce time and energy resources—inhibit the comprehensive elaboration of their role in the capitalist system dependent on their labour. As Gramsci points out, "the worker or proletarian … is not specifically characterised by his [or her] manual or instrumental work, but by performing this work in specific conditions and in specific social relations" (*Prison* 8). These conditions reflect a certain lack of control over the relations of production. Moreover, these same conditions restrict access to modes of dissemination that enable the development of a collective consciousness around shared conditions. Brand's body of work, because of its committed scrutiny of these subjects, and because of its currency in the public domain, goes some of the way toward rectifying this underdeveloped, but also ill-acknowledged, popular critical consciousness.

The cultivation of critical self-consciousness is significant for the reason that it increases awareness around three crucial areas: (1) the operating principles of the relations of production; (2) how Black women—in this instance—contribute in some ways to the maintenance of the existing set of relations; and (3) how Black women can, themselves, work proactively to counter the exploitative economic system within which they labour, often in well delimited occupations. Bearing in mind the predominance of people of colour in domestic service and low-wage labour positions in Canada, the obligation to formulate tactics oppositional to current relations of production, so as to safeguard the rights of working-class individuals embedded in the capitalist system, should be self-evident.

The critical social analysis at the heart of Brand's body of work, whether filmic or textual, non-fictional or poetic, can be read as fundamental to the development of critical consciousness among Black women—and indeed people of colour. Because class position is neither immutable nor intrinsic, but is a by-product of the deliberate organization of economic structures, it should be evident that economic forces are not, at bottom, determinate of class position: “The level of development of the material forces of production provides a basis for the emergence of the various social classes, each one of which represents a function and has a specific position within production itself” (*Prison* 180-81). Put another way, Gramsci posits that it is human will that “becomes the driving force of the economy and moulds objective reality,” the reality to which a practical response must be formulated (*Political* 35). The ability to render transparent those socio-economic structures that evolved to streamline exploitation based on race and gender, and thereby to promote proactive resistance against them, is dependent upon the intellectual interpretation of those forces in operation.

“Common Sense” and the organic intellectual

To accomplish the first of the three objectives I have identified as central to Brand’s political-activist programme—to promote awareness and critical consciousness of the operating principles of the relations of production—the organic intellectual serves to engender a new vision of the world among the working class, a philosophy of praxis. Salamini describes the underlying principles of this social model in this way:

> The starting point of a new philosophy of the masses must be … a criticism of common sense as a first step, toward a more general criticism of past philosophical systems. Criticism does not mean rejection, rather it means the transformation and transcendence of common sense, which implies the acceptance of vital, positive and progressive elements present in it. (95)

Common sense, while a concept that is the object of considerable attention within Gramsci’s writings, can be glossed for present purposes in the following manner: “For lack of [subjection to] critical consciousness, common sense is intrinsically incapable of thinking historicistically and dialectically. Its conception of reality is, in fact, static, reified, naturalist, fatalist, and its beliefs are held by the masses as natural imperatives" (Salamini 95). Clearly, a transformation of the underlying beliefs that common sense helps to maintain must be brought about in order to enable a populace at large to engage with the world in a dynamic, dialectical manner.

Walter Adamson remarks on Gramsci's construal of "common sense" in the following way:

> Despite its connotations in English, then, "common sense" is ordinarily very far removed from the real needs and interests of the masses of ordinary people who hold it; thought that satisfies real needs and interests is referred to by Gramsci as "good sense." Yet, at the same time, common sense is never simply identical with ruling class ideology; this ideology at best only "limit[s] the original thought of the popular masses in a negative direction." (150)

Considering this rather unpromising elaboration, it is appropriate to ask why Gramsci would advocate for the transformation and transcendence of common sense rather than the promulgation of an entirely new, originary set of beliefs—if such a development were possible. Gramsci's insistence upon the inherent "historical, ideological and political characteristics of common sense" (Salamini 83) provides some answer to this query, insofar as critical consciousness exercised upon an intimately familiar body of common knowledge can operate to accentuate and deconstruct the formative, functional ideological tenets that ultimately endow common sense with its considerable political and social authority. A shift in political consciousness cannot at inception be fully dissociated from already operative systems of thought and social power relations without alienating the general population as a result.

A proactive political philosophy of praxis must, "[f]irst of all," Gramsci writes, "be a criticism of 'common sense', basing itself initially, however, on common sense in order to demonstrate that 'everyone' is a philosopher and that it is not a question of introducing from scratch a scientific form of thought into everyone's individual life, but of renovating and making 'critical' an already existing activity" (*Prison* 330–31). This conception, that "everyone" is an intellectual, although they may not have the function of an intellectual in society, is an ideological forerunner of the emphasis Paulo Freire places on the inherent knowledge of each and every student. Freire writes:

> [F]or such a long time now, I have argued the need we progressive educators have never to underestimate or reject knowledge had from living experience, with which educands come to school or to informal centers of education.... [T]o underestimate the wisdom that necessarily results from sociocultural experience, is at one and the same time a scientific error, and the unequivocal expression of the presence of an elitist ideology. (84)

The successful cultivation by the organic intellectual of a mature, sophisticated cognitive critique within a subaltern class is, in Freire's view, dependent to a large extent on the merging of the subaltern's knowledge, gained from "living experience," with knowledge of a theoretical bent. For Gramsci, a Marxist, this amalgamation is an integral component of the social (r)evolutionary process. Salamini explains:

> The real task of Marxism is that of 'raising the tone and intellectual level of the masses' and making them conscious and active participants in the revolutionary

> process and critical elaboration of thought. The task is that of aristocratizing the masses, of "reforming intellectually and morally social strata [that are] culturally backward." The renovation of common sense, however, is not the function of intellectuals separated from common sense, but in dialectical relationship with it. Any statement to the contrary would amount to an a-historical affirmation. (96)

Brand's many articles, her films, and her oral herstory work are critical of the social and economic practices that have regulated the kinds of wage and domestic labour historically consigned to Black women; she is critical also of gender-bound roles intensely structured by race. Her work makes intelligible to the lay reader the nature and effects of hegemonic material and ideological forces. In her sociological essays, which are examined in Chapter 3, Brand advocates for the examination of common-sense racism as a force that operates to maintain inequality in the labour market, privileging whites while penalizing people of colour.

As an organic intellectual responsive to and invested in a particular constituency, Brand takes advantage of and cultivates the knowledge that arises involuntarily but pragmatically from an inherently unequal relationship between Blacks and dominant white power structures. Brand reflects:

> To be black in a predominantly white society, with all its incumbent difficulties, forces one constantly to evaluate experience against an active and external mechanism of subordination. That is, laws, rules, policy, attitudes, all designed to inhibit one's activities and aspirations, have to be responded to, so these analyses become part of how life is articulated; these laws, rules, policy, attitudes, etc., are the obstacles through which life is negotiated. (*NBC* 31)

Essential to the transformation and transcendence of a common-sense understanding of the relations of production is the cultivation of a strain of critical consciousness among disempowered populations that derives from these daily negotiations; this is particularly true with respect to the roles individuals stand to play in the maintenance or uprooting of such relations. In the vernacular of Freire, this process is one in which the oppressed is able "to 'step back' from the oppressor, and localize the oppressor 'outside' themselves"; Freire understands this process as directed towards the deconstruction of the "'adherence' of the oppressed to the oppressor" (48). In cultivating the indigenous, counterhegemonic intelligence of a subaltern class, Brand, too, distils, articulates, and disseminates oppositional discourse and narrative.

Before I go farther, it is perhaps worth clarifying my understanding of *discourse* as modes of communication that are constituted by habitual patterns of individual and collective articulations of broadly-defined and communally-held social values. These values adhere to constructions of race, gender, sexuality, class, age, and political orientation, as well as to material goods. Discursive constructions are inevitably implicated in a complex web of positive and negative significations that are most often, though not inescapably, determined by one's own subject location within these categories. Articulations of communally-held social values are disseminated through an all-embracing array of textual, visual, symbolic, and aural mediums. As such, oppositional discourse must also, and of course does, manifest itself in all mediums of communication and signification, although it can at times be stymied—or overrun—by hegemonic social paradigms.

The intellectual and moral engagement of the masses, to render transparent their own practical functions within the dominant relations of production, is implicit in Gramsci's thinking. This maieutic process is fundamental to the evolution of auxiliary and subaltern classes into politically and culturally autonomous collectives. For Gramsci, in his day, the identification of an oppressed peasant class in need of collective representation was comparatively straightforward, since many labourers were initially organized within general categories of employment and their associated syndicates. For Brand, however, a substantial component of building collective consciousness is dependent upon an initially diffuse understanding of just what that basic collectivity might represent. The failure to develop a sophisticated overview of existing conditions prevents a class from achieving its own sense of social cohesion. From this perspective, the comparative un-importance of economic forces relative to the more vital development of a collective human will should become evident. Gramsci observes: "What comes to pass does so not so much because a few people want it to happen, as because the mass of citizens abdicate their responsibility" (*Political* 17). Salamini elaborates, positing that "the masses are not only the protagonists of the history made by dominant groups, elites or individuals, through their indifference, but also the non-history, that is, of what did not happen for them, in a positive sense" (78). Brand's work, viewed within the framework of the organic intellectual, can be understood as organized to heighten and refine the critical consciousness of individuals unwilling or unable to "abdicate their responsibility" either for history or non-history.

With a pragmatic, proactive approach to social conflict spanning thirty years, Brand facilitates increased awareness of Black women's involvement in transformative, often political movements: these might include the contributions of women in Grenada's New Jewel movement within the People's Revolutionary Government,[10] or women's involvement in local movements and community associations, involvement that is reflected in the majority of the narratives that appear in *No Burden to Carry*. The contextualization and representation of active social and political involvement serves to address the final two components of the project of the organic intellectual as I have identified them: first, how Black women—in this instance—contribute in some ways to their own oppression, and, second, how they can and do work proactively to counter exploitative economic and social systems within which they labour to subsist. As Joan W. Scott observes, to undertake the novel representation of movements that have been commonly ignored or suppressed is itself a proactive step: "Making the movement visible breaks the silence about it, challenges prevailing notions, and opens new possibilities for everyone" (57).

Herstorical context and the discursive archive

Brand's work, regardless of the genre in which it appears, functions through two basic processes: the first is to map or detail the constitution of Canadian Black women's subjectivity within a socio-historical, feminist-materialist analysis; the second practice is the promotion of Black women's exposure to this body of social mapping. These practices emancipate, at base, the pedagogical potential of a dialectical relationship that partners the deconstruction of the Black female social body in Canada with the dissemination of that analysis; these two practices are brought to bear in order to amend critical, substantive omissions from Canadian historical memory and the social record.

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[10] In *No Language Is Neutral*, Brand dedicates poems to Phyllis Coard and Jacqueline Creft (Minister of Women's Affairs and Education, respectively).

In a fundamental sense, the practice of the articulation of experience works to unite related interests and to simultaneously destabilize common-sense knowledge of social paradigms. "Ultimately," notes Salamini, "it is society, culture and language which provide the individual with a common stock of knowledge made-up of specific recipes for acting and interpreting the very world he [sic] inhabits with other men [sic]" (97). However, if this "common stock of knowledge" excludes or misrepresents one's presence in fundamentally reductive ways, you must, Brand avers, "write yourself" (Novak 273). In this regard, Brand consistently engenders spaces for the literary articulation and scholarly documentation of experiences common to peoples in Canada who have been and are marginalized because of race and gender. Brand makes heard—in women's own voices when possible—the herstories, experiences, and social conditions endured by certain populations long silenced by the racist, patriarchal elisions that characterize Canadian historiography and social practice.

A principal dividend of the praxis of feminist-materialist deconstruction is the affirming, legitimizing effect of speaking one's life story into the historical record, particularly when that account had previously been proscribed by the institutional and cultural repudiation of the validity or value of this kind of entry. The proactive generation of such biographical and autobiographical entries produces a socio-herstorical context and discursive archive within which to explore issues of the oppression and recuperation of Black women's agency in opposition to hegemonic structures. This archive is not organized as a sentimental representation, but as part of an accessible, dynamic presence. Provision of this record is an imperative component in the process of recuperating and empowering the agency of Black women in Canada. It is primarily through the examination of the discursive records of social engagement and interaction that one is able to historicize the development of subjectivities while resisting the temptation to allow subjective interpretations of lived events to interpose the chimera of objective reality. Quite rightly, Salamini argues "[o]bjectivity is both historicist and humanist in its essence; that is, objective reality is always a historical process constantly subordinated to man's [sic] manipulation and classification" (54). Gramsci phrases this observation more bluntly: 'We know reality only in relation to man [sic], and since man is historical[-]becoming, knowledge and reality are also a becoming and so is objectivity'" (*Prison* 446).

Revisiting Scott's comment on the value inherent in simply "making a movement visible," it becomes evident that a more nuanced analysis of representing experience is required. Scott, in cautionary elaboration, proposes an interpretive framework within which to locate and examine lived experience *while* positioning the subject within a historical context:

> Making visible the experience of a different group exposes the existence of repressive mechanisms, but not the inner workings or logics; we know that difference exists, but we don't understand it as constituted relationally. For that we need to attend to the historical processes that, through discourse, position subjects and produce their experiences. It is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience. Experience in this definition then becomes not the origin of our explanation, not the authoritative (because seen

> or felt) evidence that grounds what is known, but rather that which we seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced. To think about experience in this way is to historicize it as well as to historicize the identities it produces. (59–60)

Brand's analysis, which historicizes the overlapping Eurocentric and androcentric biases of Canadian historiography, makes it apparent that the critical fallout of this combination is a paucity of information about Black women's herstory and a scarcity of reference resources. Argues Brand, "[t]he status of Black peoples in Canadian society, the existence of racism as an organizing principle here in the past and the present militated and militates against the existence of such records" (*NBC* 30). It must be acknowledged, in the face of socio-economic marginalization, that the poverty of the Black herstorical and historical records in Canada is detrimental to the development of individual and collective agency: without cognition of the efficacy and beneficial consequences of one's own—or one's foremothers'—political and social agency, actual achievements can be (dis)missed as unexceptional, merely individual, and isolated occurrences.

The social profit in disseminating Black women's narratives and related writings derives from the contextualization of examples of individual struggles for whole subjectivity that such narratives highlight. Writing in the introduction of *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives*, the Personal Narratives Group of Indiana University contends,

> [p]ersonal narratives of nondominant social groups (women in general, racially or ethnically oppressed people, lower-class people, lesbians) are often particularly effective sources of counterhegemonic insight because they expose the viewpoint

> embedded in dominant ideology as particularist rather than universal, and because they reveal the reality of a life that defies or contradicts the rules. ("Origins" 7)

Brand echoes this line of argument in a slightly altered vein when she makes the case that "the historical relationship between Black peoples in Canada and 'mainstream' society has been one of subordination, which doubtlessly taints a historical record often written by, spoken about and interpreted by those who hold power within the relationship" (*NBC* 31). Enabling Black women to speak their own lives, and to situate those lives within the often sexist and racist Canadian nation-narratives that delimit them, Brand compels the narrator and the reader to question the discrepancies and fractures implicit in those homogenizing narratives.

The community of audience

Brand's creative and non-fiction works are expositions produced in specific genres that together serve as a foundation upon which an imagined Black community can take shape. This is an imagined community *with* which Brand's work is shared, rather than merely a constituency upon which it is focussed. As this is the case, two fundamentals need to be explored in more detail: first, the prickly issue of audience as coterminous with an imagined community; second, the equally problematic—because contradictory—notion of the cultivation of an autonomous and self-determined subaltern class.

Essential to an understanding of Brand's body of work is the notion of audience as coterminous with the Black community. As I have already suggested, it is possible to speak of a circumscribed audience insofar as Brand has identified "this hearer who must hear it [i.e., her writing] out of the history of colonialism and slavery, and [the] continued kind of oppression in the world as we know it today" (*LS* 432). Still, the singularity and homogeny this pronoun implies, "this hearer," is inherently problematic: to assume a broad uniformity of interests and experience across a disembodied audience would be unwise at best, and at worst irresponsible. To insist upon the existence of a coherent or unified Black community, present on a national scale, can only be considered utopian or absurd. Nonetheless, as Brand and Krisantha Sri Bhaggiyadatta's co-authored work (*Rivers Have Sources, Trees Have Roots*) demonstrates, it is possible to talk of shared experiences and a politics of identity. To conceptualize Brand's oeuvre as the applied praxis of community building through the mediums of text and film, however, is nonetheless a productive mode of reading the range of her written work.

To invoke Benedict Anderson's much exercised phrase, to build or imagine community by augmenting the Black socio-historical record and by raising Black critical self-consciousness is, in fact, Brand's means of intervention. Anderson suggests "all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined" (6). However, in order to conceive of and situate the Black community envisaged by Brand, exception must be taken to Anderson's insinuation that community is in effect inseparable from the nation; he writes: "Finally, it [the nation] is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (7). However, I suggest that the depth and horizontal dimensions of the nation are liable to be "imagined" disparately—indeed, rather less charitably—as that imagination depends upon one's mean location in the nation's vertical hierarchy. Brand appears to have differentiated herself from this presumed, "deep, horizontal comradeship" that is Canada, and is intent upon the cultivation of a self-authored Black women's community.

A return to Gramsci is appropriate in turning to the second concern raised with respect to positing Brand's oeuvre as the groundwork upon which an imagined Black community might take form: the improbable fostering of an autonomous and self-authored subaltern class. Gramsci theorizes that the "historical unity of the ruling classes is realised in the State, and their history is essentially the history of States"; in contrast, "[t]he subaltern classes, by definition, are not unified and cannot unite until they are able to become a 'State': their history, therefore, is intertwined with that of civil society, and thereby with the history of States and groups of States" (*Prison* 52). When one considers the reality of slavery imposed upon Blacks by European nations throughout the New World, the "intertwined" history of foundational and subaltern classes is self-evident. Be this as it may, Brand, in effect, *imagines* the coherence of a primarily subaltern community—though also of an auxiliary community—that can establish a degree of unity despite its subaltern, diffuse condition.[11] As Anderson suggests, "[c]ommunities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (6). The style or mode of imagination that Brand deploys, then, is the cultural production of generic works insistent upon the uncoupling of the Black-imagined Black community from the hegemonic construction of Canada as imagined by a white,

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[11] In addition to the fundamental classes, Gramsci also identifies auxiliary and subaltern classes. Auxiliary classes, Salamini explains, "are those which assent to specific programs and ideologies of dominant classes, and thereby form the basis of their hegemony"; in contrast, "subaltern classes are those which either are excluded from participation in the hegemony of dominant classes or passively consent to it" (80).

Eurocentric population. Brand's work provides source material with which a proactive imagination can better devise a self-authored history and consciousness. The distinct generic formats Brand deploys allow for alternative modes of contextualization and invite oppositional imaginings.

Brand articulates a distinct race-based consciousness that sets her and her agenda for Blacks and Black women on a socio-political track that departs from the social mainstream; this course takes as its primary destination neither arrival at a form of racial egalitarianism, nor the assimilation of Blacks within Canadian culture such that Black heterogeneity is obfuscated and oppressed. The counter-discourse Brand authors is made possible by her keen and enduring awareness of residing at the centre of a cultural and historic community, one not dependent on pre-eminence within Canada for its validation. Questioned by Novak about whether she considers herself as working on the margins of Canadian writing, Brand—refreshing and edifying in her displacement of conventional notions of what, in Canada, constitutes the 'centre'—responds in the negative:

> I find myself in the middle of black writing. I'm in the centre of black writing, and those are the sensibilities that I check to figure out something that's truthful. I write out of a literature, a genre, a tradition, and that tradition is the tradition of black writing. And whether that black writing comes from the United States as African American writing or African Caribbean writing or African writing from the continent, it's in that tradition that I work. (273)

Bracing in her refusal of Novak's presumptive Eurocentric sensibilities, Brand's alignment with a pan-African, diasporic writing tradition is a galvanizing affirmation that writing within Canada by Blacks and other peoples of colour need not have its "success" judged by its position relative to the centre/periphery binary that Canada's cultural and racial majority has established, a majority that effectively institutes the parameters within which artistic output is produced, the criterion by which it is assessed, and the "sensibilities" that confer cultural significance.[12] While Brand's alignment with an African and diasporic tradition by no means guarantees the popular or financial success of her writing within Canada, it does provide a means of psychic fortification in that it makes accessible Black-affirmative discourses; these, of course, become essential when entrenched in a culture of "white sensibilities" that ignores or distorts the historical and cultural presence of Blacks within the nation.

Brand's refusal to accept responsibility for the unsound and injurious epistemologies of others reflects a similar approach to intra-social interaction. Speaking of racism with Novak, for example, Brand refuses responsibility for changing the racist attitudes of white Canadians: "I think that racism is *not* our problem. I think it's a white problem. I think [people of colour] can fight against it. I think it's our job to fight for good laws, to fight for equality, but in terms of doing things like changing white attitudes, *white people have to do that work*" (emphasis added, 274). This stance encourages the proactive engagement of Blacks with structures that can legislate and enforce change while making it the responsibility of whites to understand Canada's historic and economic foundations in racism and of contemporary sites of conflict.

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[12] Questioned by Makeda Silvera in 1995 on the failure of *No Language Is Neutral* to garner the Governor General's Award for poetry in 1992, Brand registers no surprise:

> Are you crazy? I didn't think the book would win. I thought the book should win because I thought it was the best book. But I didn't think it would because I know where I live. I live in a white-dominated society. They [whites] are not about to let anybody of colour, at this moment, get any closer to the prizes and accolades at the very heart of their national discourse.... They have complete control at this point over all those things. ("In the Company" 369)

Brand's intense interest in contextualizing the silence surrounding the political, social, and economic empowerment of Blacks and Black women in Canada coincides with the project of recuperating their collective agency from the socio-economic periphery they have historically been forced to occupy. Writing, as a part of this project, serves as a political tool essential to the deconstruction and exploitation of weaknesses in dominant social and political systems. Writing, in fact, is an act indispensable to cultural and racial survival. In this regard, Brand's writing praxis exemplifies the declaration Barbara Christian makes about her own work: "what I write and how I write is done in order to save my own life" (61). Brand's oeuvre suggests a fairly literal application of this philosophy, and its multiple lessons resurface throughout her writings.

It is quite reasonable, then, that in order to realize a broad representation and contextualization of the lived experiences of Blacks and Black women, her own included, Brand deploys collected oral herstories, scholarly essays, fiction, poetry, and autobiographical material. Moreover, she exploits the differentially expressive strengths of this wide range of written genre, in combination with interviews and video documentaries, to contribute to a growing portrayal of—and imagining of—the lives, agendas, values, crises, and activism of a community of Blacks in this country.

Previous Brand criticism

There is, of course, a considerable body of critical works that have taken portions of Brand's oeuvre their focus. Earlier work tends to centre on Brand as a member of a coterie of Afro-Caribbean women that includes Claire Harris, M. Nourbese Philip, and Makeda Silvera. In light of Brand's constant and considerable output, as well as the critical acclaim she has received, most contemporary work, not surprisingly, tends to centre on Brand as an individual artist. The following is by no means an exhaustive account of that critical body, but considers some of the key works.

Carol Morrell's 1994 edited collection, *Grammar of Dissent: Poetry and Prose by Claire Harris, M. Nourbese Philip, Dionne Brand*, is among the first comparative studies and, as an anthology, comprises a broad selection of representative works from each author. Morrell contends that these women "employ three grand strategies in their otherwise highly individual writing projects: they take an essentialist subject-position, they use that subject-position for political intervention, and they startle the reader by interrogating standard English and substituting new usages, often in the Caribbean demotic, for old ones" (Introduction 10). All three "'throw their voices,'" Morell suggests, "speaking through … other people with whom they identify." This "strategy … allows them both a community and a coherent sense of self—however fictive or imaginative—from which to act and write" (10). The positive effect of this attention to their own experience and that of other Black women is the discovery and confirmation that "what is personal to oneself is *also* personal to many others, and thus that one's experience is not unique, to be suffered through in isolation, and that the large social patterns that underlie the similarities among the personal experiences of so many are in fact politically, materially, and economically based" (12). Having identified and helped to define a general subject-position illustrative of Black women's experience, "their collective project, and their distinctive contribution to Canadian literature," asserts

Morrell, "is to insert their own and other voices into what has (following the European tradition) been considered the 'high culture' of poetry" (13). In the realm of language, Morrell argues that Harris, Nourbese Philip, and Brand "write against dominant language" and that to do so "is essential because language encodes the cultural and political facts of dominance and exclusion." In this way, the three "speak *for* (the experiences of blacks and women)" (15). Although I understand differently than Morrell how Brand conceives of her writing—that is, as I stressed earlier, Brand writes "*to*" and not "*for*" Black women—Morrell's essay nonetheless provides a sound interpretive foundation from which to approach the work of these three authors.

In her essay "'Good Enough to Work, Good Enough to Stay': M. Nourbese Philip, Dionne Brand, and Makeda Silvera and Women's Dignity in Canadian Exile" (1997), Myriam Chancy contends of the authors, "[t]heirs is a vision of recuperation by which the true-life conditions of Afro-Caribbean women in Canada are truthfully laid bare and possessed as a tool of affirmation." Full disclosure of that vision requires, however, "a more accurate rendering of the ways in which Canada replicates imperial ideology in its historical treatment of ... Afro-Caribbean women" and people of colour in general (79). Chancy foregrounds Brand's and Silvera's use of oral history as a resource and methodology suitable for informing current understanding of social histories and the establishment of a sense among Blacks of "their interconnectedness as a people of African decent" (87). Examining Brand's *Older Stronger Wiser*, *Sisters in the Struggle*, and *No Burden to Carry*, in addition to Silvera's volume of the accounts of Caribbean women participants in Canada's Domestic Scheme, *Silenced*, Chancy extols orality as the medium for the popular communication of lived experience. The result, she affirms, is movement "toward cross-cultural coalition building" that results in "affirming Black women's identities transhistorically" (95). In considering, also, Nourbese Philip's attention to the implications and uses of silence, and her active adaptation of otherwise oppressive language traditions, Chancy credits the three authors with promoting "[s]elf-definition and affirmation" (120) by means of "rewriting history through oral history, fiction, poetry, and film" (122). In many respects, Chancy's essay forecasts my own approach to Brand's diverse works. I differ from Chancy, however, in my understanding of Brand's, Silvera's, and Nourbese Philip's immigration from the Caribbean and their subsequent positionality in Canada. Chancy's use of the term "exile" (79) to describe the condition of these three authors disregards the clear evidence of their manifest commitment to occupying their rightful space in Canada, a theme that is certainly consistent in Brand's work. They might find themselves to be a*lienated* or *marginalized*, but I question the relevance or accuracy of "exile" as a descriptor.

In her inaptly titled essay "Recovering History: The Poems of Dionne Brand" (1996), Krishna Sarbadhikary attempts to describe the reclamation of woman's history in Brand's poetry but focuses, in effect, on Brand's interest in generating a gynocentric community, on the need to "fight phallocentricism [sic] … by emphasizing woman-to-woman relatedness" (121). Sarbadhikary suggests that "the major concern of Caribbean women poets has been to define an 'authentic' self which is Black and Female. In this search for representation of the authentic self an overriding concern for some has been a search for language to encode their experience … and [the] use of radically different forms to express the reality of their being" (118). She goes on to explore how the articulation of an "'authentic' self" is facilitated by the promotion of women's interconnection and communication. A range of contradictions troubles this essay. Of most concern is Sarbadhikary's assertion of an essentialist "condition of alienation" common to "all black people" (116). Even as she later clarifies that "a precise definition of 'Black' can be problematical," and "no universal or unitary category of 'feminism'" can exist (118), the smattering of claims to universality found throughout the paper strike me as a perplexing oversight.

As one example of the disparities that mark the perspectives of Blacks emerging from (post-)colonial settings, Susan Gingell examines elements of Brand's *'Fore Day Morning*, *Primitive Offensive*, *No Language Is Neutral*, and the short story "St. Mary's Estate," as rewritings of Derek Walcott's "Ruins of a Great House," "A Far Cry from Africa," *Another Life*, and portions of *Midsummer*. In "Returning to Come Forward: Dionne Brand Confronts Derek Walcott," Brand's contrary and unsympathetic reframing of features and remnants of slave and neo-colonial cultures, which Walcott addresses in his works, is of particular interest to Gingell. Brand's "political activism," Gingell argues, "gives her work a political charge that Walcott's lacks, his socio-political critique being always somewhat neutralized by his divided identification as son and victim of Empire" (49). Gingell's discerning and precise reading of Brand's texts, against those of Walcott, highlights two poets' disparate readings of social oppression and inclusion, of economic exploitation and the belief that "colonization brought civilization" (Brand, "The Caribbean" 26), and of Walcott's deficient cognizance of the need for "socialist revolution and gender politics" (Gingell 45), on the one hand, and, on the other, Brand's manifest commitment to those practices and values.

Heather Smyth, in "Sexual Citizenship and Caribbean-Canadian Fiction: Dionne Brand's *In Another Place, Not Here* and Shani Mootoo's *Cereus Blooms at Night*" (1999), takes up these two authors' fictive framing of a space that Walcott does not address. Smyth takes as her subject "the withholding of [a] sense of belonging and cultural citizenship from lesbians and gay men in Caribbean cultural and national space" (141). She looks to Mootoo's and Brand's novels for the elaboration of "a critique of homophobia in Caribbean culture, at the same time [that each writer asserts] a sense of 'ownership' over Caribbean cultural space by creating a semi-utopian Caribbean space for their lesbian and gay characters" (141–42). Concerned with the negotiation of the insider/outsider status of characters whose socially-transgressive sexual and gender practices stymie sexual, cultural, and social belonging and legitimacy, Smyth outlines the ways in which the authors' fictions frame the potential for "decoloniz[ed] assertions of gay and lesbian subjectivity" (144). "Brand's and Mootoo's novels," Smyth proposes, "sever the link between homophobic and heterosexist allocations of Caribbean cultural citizenship and the work of decolonization and bring together an anti-racist politics with an affirmation of Caribbean gay men's and lesbians' cultural belonging" (145). In conclusion, Smyth asserts that in order to undermine the real-world exclusion of "Caribbean lesbians from national space," *In Another Place, Not Here*, in particular, embodies in its main characters (Elizete and Verlia) a dualistic strategy that shapes "a utopic assertion of Caribbean lesbians' *belonging* in Caribbean space, through a connection between lesbian erotics and Caribbean space; and an activist assertion that belonging is found through political activity, the attempt ultimately to create a social utopia" (155). Smyth's attentive reading of these texts highlights their resistance to the ingrained sexual hierarchy that dominates Caribbean social space.

In "After Modernism: Alternative Voices in the Writings of Dionne Brand, Claire Harris, and M. Nourbese Philip" (1996),[13] Lynette Hunter attends to the means by which these writers "balance the need ... to tell and retell a history more appropriate to their memories than the one on offer from the culture in power, with the pressing demand to extend the processes of self-definition and authentic voice within current literary conventions" (56). Hunter is especially interested in how these writers work to negotiate the generic and stylistic norms established by a publishing industry that ultimately responds to "an audience for whom conventional representation is, complicatedly, both profoundly habitual, universalizing and essentialist, as well as the recognized strategy for making 'reality claims,' particularly about history" (57). In answer, Hunter argues,

> Rather than pursuing an ahistorical postmodernism or the romanticist individualism/heroics of the surreal, these writers offer a set of historically-based alternatives that shift away from the heroism of alienation toward questions of authenticity that deal in engagement and social support that generate questions about trust: trust in ideology, in history and in language. (60)

"The pursuit of the authentic voice and image," Hunter continues, "has become a contemporary attempt to speak of experience that is denied, oppressed, subtly distracted and disembodied by modes of representation coming from politically and economically dominant cultures" (60). Hunter's attention to the struggle to articulate and represent an

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[13] This chapter first appeared as an essay entitled "After Modernism: Alternative Voices in the Writings of Dionne Brand, Claire Harris, and Marlene Philip," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 62.2 (Winter 1992–1993) : 256–81.

"authentic voice and image" in a profit-based publishing milieu, particularly in Canada (where the popular readership is not deeply or analytically aware of the perpetuation of exclusionary practices within the nation), sets up a crucial critical apparatus with which to assess the disruptive strategies of hegemonically resistive literature.

George Elliot Clarke's 2000 article, "Harris, Philip, Brand: Three Authors in Search of Literate Criticism," takes to task the critical work of earlier Harris, Philip, and Brand scholars, including, among others, that of Morrell, Chancy, and Hunter. Clarke's frequently acerbic objections seem to centre on what he portrays as the unbridled bestowal of liberal-minded accolades in the guise of literary criticism by "wanna-be" social reformists. Clarke writes:

> [O]ne of the terrible intoxications of literary theory is that one dreams that one can do socio-political good, dispelling mean forces of malice and ignorance, delivering into the illumination of academic discourse entire canons—or communities—which have been consigned to the limbo of marginality.... Yet, there is something of the missionary position inherent in the posture, especially when an exuberant idealism leads one to champion communities to which one is merely an observer, or a guest, or, perhaps, an interloper, or even, merely, charitably, a missionary. (163)

I agree with Clarke that critical integrity is undermined when naïve, "exuberant idealism" dictates the bestowal of unfettered adoration and tribute upon an author. Appropriation of the "other's" voice is also, of course, highly problematic and inappropriate. I also agree with Clarke's assessment that in these critics' works "exuberant idealism" tends, on occasion, to overflow the banks of discretion and down into the lowlands of exhilaration.

However, Clarke seems to discount—too lightly, I suggest—the critical analysis of those he rebukes, and to misjudge the spirit of political affinity and affirmation that infuses their work. He states, and not without reason, that Hunter, Morrell, and Chancy, along with Rinaldo Walcott, Susan Rudy, and Victor J. Ramraj, "exalt Harris, Philip and Brand as standard-bearers of feminism, or anti-racism, or socialism, or anti-imperialism or anti-homophobia (and, in Brand's case, all of the above)." However, he suggests that they do so in order that

> white female critics are given leave to talk about race; white male critics (though suspiciously few to date) are freed to discuss repressed issues…; black critics are empowered to discuss sexism and homophobia; and exilic post-colonial critics [here Clarke means Haitian-Canadian Myriam Chancy] are empowered to focus on the utopia of the lost home and the cold evils of the "new land." (178)

Unless I entirely misunderstand his meaning, I find the implication of Clark's formulation misguided; that is, that academic, critical assessment of Black women artists should remain the purview of other Black women, or that do-gooder literary critics and interlopers select areas of study only when they can manufacture some specious socio-political affiliation so they might ride the coattails of "morally superior" artist through the gates of redemption and rectitude (163).

No doubt Clarke would question what it is that I, as a white heterosexual male Canadian, hope to gain from pursuing this extended work on Dionne Brand. After all, I do not have ties to the local Black community, nor can I claim any links to Black cultural or social organizations. As one who has "overheard" Brand, however, I do have a deep respect and appreciation for the work she produces as she seeks to articulate the extensive and severe failings of hegemonic culture in Canada. I recognize, also, the absolute necessity of that articulation—in the expression of a particular set of values, the accounts of grievous and longstanding injustices, and the indispensable elaboration of a deconstructive critical consciousness—as provisional means to alter the dominant social practices that are driven by patriarchy, capitalism, and fear. I also appreciate the tremendous sensuous and sensual aesthetic qualities and artistic depth of Brand as a remarkable artist.

Articulating genres

This dissertation is the first work that considers the full scope of Brand's oeuvre and seeks to understand individual generic components as discrete interventions in the process of correcting the prolonged silence or silencing of Black voices in Canada, particularly the scarcity of Black herstories and Black presence in social and historical records. Where appropriate, peoples of colour are also included in Brand's elaboration of a heterogeneous rendering of the nation. Just as elision as a consequence of race takes many forms, the generic variation that characterizes Brand's output allows for multiple articulations and modulations of presence. She comments on this adaptation:

> A long time ago I gave up the idea of doing this *magnificent* sort of theme thing, right? For precisely the reasons of how Black presence exists in the world. So I refuse, in a sense, *a* solution to the question. I'm determined to look at the minutia, the small moments of it. Because I think, in fact, the *act* of race and racism is to sweep away very quickly whole masses of people with *one* kind of ideology. So that I feel like my work is to piece back together small bit by small

> bit the actual makeup of this human thing. So, *if*, when I was a teenager, I thought one poem would conquer all (*laughter*)—it would be nice, but. But also in resistance to that homogenizing, stereotyping machinery, I see each piece of the work as figuring out some other question, some other bit of it. (Personal interview)

This dissertation argues that the works Brand authors, edits, and directs are to be read as articulate incursions against the persistence of Canada's homogenizing, Eurocentric nation-narratives.

Brand takes advantage of the rhetorical strategies inherent to the genres she recruits: the immediacy and persuasiveness of film's visual impact, which lends it ostensible authority,[14] is, for example, augmented further by the characteristic ease of its dissemination; the compelling nature of oral herstory makes previously elided narratives available to the public; and the analytical clarity of short essays, which render lucid critical assessments of sociological phenomena. Brand exercises readers' familiarity with generic elements and traditions and thus invests her fiction with greater historical resonance; she deploys the flexibility of poetry to morph orthodox languages into something heteroglot, polyphonic, and deeply evocative; and she makes use of the associative capacity of the extended-essay form to generate mental connections that enable incisive perspectives on the hegemonic structuring of Canadian society and culture.

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[14] Candida Rifkin, in her unpublished dissertation, "The Burden of the Body: Selfhood and Representation in the Work of Dionne Brand," draws on W. J. T. Mitchell's *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* to highlight the particular strength of visual communication. Mitchell writes: "A verbal representation cannot represent—that is, make present—the object in the same way a visual representation can. It may refer to an object, describe it, invoke it, but it can never bring its visual presence before us in the way pictures do. Words can 'cite" but never 'sight' their objects" (qtd. in Rifkin 46).

Brand makes the most of these genres in order to elicit the progressive reading and expression of socio-historically but also profoundly human needs: to belong, to differ, to claim history, to develop relationships, and to articulate the self. This process is inevitably a paradoxical one because it must involve, on the one hand, the education of the subaltern and fundamental classes (alike) in the analysis and demystification of hegemonic processes so that the material relations of production that shape social development are revealed; simultaneously, the presentation of positive social models is an imperative component of this process in order that constructive opposition remains imaginable and sustainable.

* * *

Chapters 1 and 2 represent a dialectic of discourses: that of the "masses," on the one hand, and on the other, the analytical appraisal of the inequity of socio-economic schemes operative in Canada that are rendered by those informed by critical consciousness. In both instances, experience and evaluation are manifest through the spoken word (albeit transcribed in the case of *No Burden to Carry*).

In Chapter 1, "'This is so, isn't it?': The Brave Propositions of Brand's Documentaries," I examine the four films upon which Brand worked in roles ranging from associate director and writer, to co-director and full director. They are, *Older Stronger Wiser*, *Sisters in the Struggle*, *Long Time Comin'*, and *Listening for Something...Adrienne Rich and Dionne Brand in Conversation*. In contrast with text, the genre of film facilitates a relatively immediate and accessible experience, particularly for viewers who might not have had a prior inclination to seek out textual materials that deal with issues such as Black women's location within patriarchy (white and Black), their relationship to the white Women's Movement of the 1960s and 1970s, or lesbianism. Each film provides a visual and aural basis for the imagining of a community of Black women in Canada, a basis that highlights not merely individual struggles, but proactive, organized responses to racism, exploitation, exclusion, and oppression. By way of the voices of women who have distinguished themselves as activist members of their communities, Brand's films establish models of empowerment for Black women as individuals and as members of a socio-political constituency. Significantly, the films also serve as conduits for the transmission of constructive wisdom and the applied activist practice and theory of women who have worked to improve equity, opportunities, and security for Blacks in Canada. In this latter respect, the films can be understood as the apparatus by which theory is passed from an organic intellectual body—because shrewd and analytically astute—to the masses—because, on the whole, less knowledgeable of the structures that organize socio-economic frameworks and the positioning of race. I also draw on the documentary theory of Paula Rabinowitz and Bill Nichols in order to examine the functional strengths of the genre as a medium appropriate to Brand's organic intellectual project.

Chapter 2, "Speaking Racism: Disruption of Canadian National Narratives," focuses upon two book-length prose works. *Rivers Have Sources, Trees Have Roots: Speaking of Racism*, is a work co-authored by Brand and Krisantha Sri Bhaggiyadatta. The collection of excerpts from many individual interviews goes a long way to dispelling the myth that racism in Canada is merely arbitrary and the experience of isolated individuals. The framing commentary of the authors sketches an agenda that promotes the deconstruction of myths about Canadian racism as well as an ideological lens through which to assess patterns of racism as they transpire in schools, in other educational settings, on the street, and at sites of employment. The direct use of the responses of interviewees, in their own words, proves a powerful tool for laying bare the impact of racism upon individuals' class location and sense of belonging.

No Burden to Carry: Narratives of Black Working Women in Ontario 1920s to 1950s is the textual offshoot of Brand's coordination of an oral herstory project, entitled "Lives of Black Working Women in Ontario," and conducted between 1988 and 1990. Scrutiny is directed at the vital contributions oral herstories stand to make on many fronts, including an implicit critique of the absence of Black women's voices from mainstream historical accounts, the recuperation of previously obscured and ignored Black Canadian women's herstory by means of their corrective articulation, affirmation of autobiography as constitutive of women's herstory, and the construction of a collaborative herstorical memory. The textual manifestation of these oral herstories prompts an exploration of the inherently discursive nature of the construction of experience and subjectivity, as well as of the intellectual and corporeal interiorization of seemingly normative social and behavioural standards. The narratives supply significant foundational material for the imagining of Black community; moreover, these narratives represent, in a manner of speaking, the accounts of "the masses" and a smattering of the "*élite*," accounts that reflect the "feelings" engendered by racist and exclusionary socio-economic practices and the negotiated understanding of those strictures that imposed social disparities. In this light, Brand, by collecting and disseminating these narratives, functions as an organic intellectual, insofar as she makes visible the dialectical relationship between the observations of "the masses" and the community's activist "*élite*." Her insistence in this work upon the importance of, and the investment in, generating space for the voices of older Black women previously excluded from naming their herstory makes possible the articulation of the accounts most threatened with disappearance from Canada's historical record.

Chapter 3, entitled "Common Sense and Capitalism: Racism, Sexism, and Class," takes as its focus a broad range of Brand's independent articles and short collaborative non-fiction work. In this chapter, I examine Brand's scholarly deconstruction of historically embedded ideological structures and programmes that manage and sustain Black women's dependence on physical labour for income, and the choreographed marginalization, fracture, and diversion of political agendas held by grass-roots organizations of women of colour. This chapter also looks at how the language and structure of print enables a level of sophisticated analysis around the issue of class-consciousness, and the ways in which class influenced the sexist divisions that marked the Black Power movement of the 1970s, as well as the racial divisions that characterized the Women's movement of the same era.

Chapter 4, "Reading Fiction's Departures: Opposition and Black-centred Discourse," focuses on Brand's two novels, *In Another Place, Not Here*, and *At the Full and Change of the Moon*. Of interest in this chapter is Brand's mobilization of generic features that link *In Another Place, Not Here* to the neo-slave narratives that began to emerge in North America in the mid-1960s. Brand makes use of generic constructs to link some of the issues that figure in traditional slave narratives to her contemporary work and thus highlights the similarities between the two epochs. Brand engages with the issue of labour, its description, and the physical exploitation of Black women; the effects of punishment, or the "whip," on the body; the flight of Blacks from the South to the North; and, additionally, the potential for the development of collectivity and the raising of critical consciousness around issues of race, gender, and class.

At the Full and Change of the Moon embodies something of a departure for Brand in that male characters play a prominent role in the narrative. This novel aims to represent Black protagonists as complex, fully rounded characters who function in the world according to their individual cognitive rationales; this, in contrast, to the one-dimensional portrayals of Blacks in the colonial literature endured by Brand in Trinidad's school system, and later in Canadian university English courses. The chapter closes with an examination of Ross Chambers' theories about how fictions exercise influence over their readers by shaping their "desires" and thereby altering their perspective on real-world conditions.

Poetry is at the centre of Chapter 5, "Revising Borders: The Sense of What a Beautiful Life Might Be." This chapter focuses principally on the relationship between Brand's poetry and her political activism. Poetry, the form with which Brand is most intimate and to which she returns to refine her capacity for "sense-making" in the world, is tightly bound to her dissection of the socio-political world. It is also the genre in which she exercises her skills to reformulate language, drawing upon Received Standard English and Trinidadian language to locate herself and her differences within an amalgam of the language of colonialism, racism, and misogyny.[15] In this manner, Brand generates a new language that accounts for difference. The chapter goes on to take a close look at the efficacy of poetry as a medium suitable for engendering critical consciousness, but one that exerts minimal influence in shaping socio-political opposition.

Finally, Chapter 6, "The Trials of Idealism and the Imperative Obstinacy of Good Faith," looks to Brand's two extended non-fiction prose works, *Bread Out of Stone: Recollections on Sex, Recognitions, Race, Dreaming, and Politics*, and *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*. These pieces centre on identifying and understanding the ideological precepts that operate to manage the material life of Canada's citizens and immigrants. As essays, the works lend themselves to a kind of associative approach to a wide range of experiences, readings, political affiliations and actions, remembrances, and impressions. The pieces are politically minded and yet personable, intimate but pedagogical. Brand addresses the issues of Canada's homogenizing nation-narratives, and the importance of cultivating an alternative cognitive schema to that which seeks human uniformity and cultural predictability, particularly in light of the inevitable exclusion from equitable social status that people of colour confront in this country. Evident in these works is Brand's longing for the maintenance of a spirit of entitlement among people of colour, rather than mere acceptance of continued diminished returns on citizenship.[16]

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[15] Where appropriate, I make use of the designations "Received Standard English" and "Trinidadian language" to differentiate between the linguistic bases that Brand draws from, follows from. This practice follows from Brand's use of the terms in her interview with Silvera ("In the Company" 367). Brand's application of the term "Trinidadian *language*" (my emphasis) contrasts with alternatives, such as Caribbean "vernacular," "demotic," or "dialect," and is reflected in Teresa Zackodnik's preference for the description "nation language." Zackodnik reasons these other terms "impart the notion that [nation language] is somehow not a language but a bastardization or degeneration of standard English" (209, n. 2). I, like Zackodnik, wish to emphasize the integrity and distinction of a linguistic system that can and does operate independently of Received Standard.

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[16] A version of this chapter has been published in an on-line journal. Wild 2002. *Crossing Boundaries: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 1.3 (Fall 2002).

Chapter 1

"This is so, isn't it?": The Brave Propositions of Brand's Documentaries

> Documentary performance and address is always about crossing boundaries—racial, sexual, class, gender, regional, temporal—as outsiders to a subculture enter into it, or as insiders from a subculture project it outward; and the intellectual—whether in Gramsci's terms traditional or organic, universal or specific in Foucault's typology—acts as the coyote smuggling across borders.
> ~ Paula Rabinowitz, *They Must Be Represented: The Politics of Documentary*

> Documentaries, then, do not differ from fictions in their constructedness as texts, but in the representations they make. At the heart of documentary is less a *story* and its imaginary world than an *argument* about the historical world.
> ~ Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary*

Documentary as communicant

As I hope I have made clear in the introduction, a pivotal function of Brand's work is to make space for Black voices that have been silenced or otherwise blocked from participation in the formation of a broadly representative Canadian national identity. For this project, the medium of documentary film proves not only surprisingly resilient, but sets off a double pragmatics of articulation: Brand is able to collect and make accessible to a widespread public herstories of resistance and community contributions made by Black women in Canada; further, she identifies the tactics of survival and theories of opposition mobilized by those women. In these ways, documentary film facilitates the circulation of political debates and activist agendas beyond the boundaries of localized intellectual and activist groups engaged in class-conscious and anti-racist feminist work. Because of the constructed immediacy of documentary film, it is often perceived as a non-mediated form and, as such, as a genre that is available for unproblematized consumption; he benefit of this characteristic association is that film has in it an innate potential to draw audiences that might not seek out or otherwise come into contact with written political texts of the sort Brand authors. Additionally, documentary in video format has considerable portability and is thus readily available to audiences within academic and institutional contexts, and to those who have access through public library systems.

One of the premier effects of documentary film is the ability to fuse public and private spheres. It is typically the practice (if not the nature) of documentary to synthesize the experience of individuals and groups as they engage with a larger public domain, whether that domain is circumscribed by the porous boundary of historical era, social movement, economic affiliation, geographical location, or, more practically, a matrix of these fields of exchange. As one cannot describe an object or a development without at the same moment representing or implicating that which it differs from, any differentiation of an individual or group through film is necessarily coeval with its contextualization within, and linkage to, the larger socio-historical surround. The effect that this dialectic of classification has upon the viewer, I propose, is equivalent to an introductory engagement with case studies. Writing in *They Must Be Represented: The Politics of Documentary*, Paula Rabinowitz paraphrases Carolyn Steedman's construal of case study in *Landscape for a Good Woman*:

> Case study … provides an antidote to the perpetual blind-spots in traditional historiography and autobiography precisely because it calls attention to gaps and

> contradictions, the discrepancies in narrative. Case study provides an alternative history to that of either annal or chronicle by emphasizing the subjectivity of the historian.... Moreover, while to a certain extent the case study seems to lift an object out of its context, in other ways, by juxtaposing one with the other, new contexts are forged. (9)

Brand's documentaries work to call attention to "the gaps and … discrepancies" that riddle Canada's seemingly homogeneous nation-narratives—ruptures and disparities that, by and large, fail to disclose evidence of the historical presence and contributions of this country's Blacks. As Rabinowitz's paraphrase underscores, the effect of Brand's focus on Black women is to cause attention to fall upon the socio-historical contexts within which they have struggled, and upon the struggles themselves.

Ironically, contrary to the reportorial objectivity with which documentary is commonly associated, Rabinowitz reasons that the genre can, in fact, move an audience to empathy and identification with its subject precisely because of the non-fictive, real-world nature of representation the genre lays claim to. The call to observe and comprehend the non-mimetic in documentary, she suggests, prompts an audience to engage with documentary's subject matter at the level of historical and active agent. This positioning differs for the reader of fictive representation who, while emotionally invested in narrative, remains a comparatively passive observer. Fiction, because mimetic, represents something *like* the world; documentary, as a non-mimetic form, requires a conscientious viewer to take a position and, in doing so, recruits the viewer as an agent active in contemporaneous circumstance. Writing in "Telling Stories with

Evidence and Arguments," Bill Nichols elucidates this relationship of the viewer to documentary and to worldview:

> The world, in documentary, is destined to bear propositions. "This is so, isn't it?" is the gist of the most common and fundamental proposition we find. It is the basic proposition made by realism. This question, as much or more than Louis Althusser's "Hey, you there!" is the basis for the social construction of reality and for the work of ideology. In documentary what "is so" is a representation of the world, and the question, "isn't it?" has to do with the credibility of the representation. (114)

Documentary, in its project to represent the real—the real social disparity and inequity that is commonly its subject matter—provokes heightened consciousness and lends an immediacy to perceived consequences, implications. The upshot, Rabinowitz suggests, is "an encounter in which observation slides into participation which somehow exceeds transference and identification" (9). Nichols' insight lends further clarity on this point:

> Documentary offers access to a shared, historical construct. Instead of *a* world, we are offered access to *the* world. The world is where, at the extreme, issues of life and death are always at hand.... Here, "Fire," "Shoot to kill," "Jump," or "Scalpel" are not simply linguistic imperatives but preludes to action that carry life and death consequences for our physical selves. (109)

Whether one considers the hard domestic labour to which the women of *Older Stronger Wiser* are constrained, or the accounts of the deaths of Black men and women at the hands of police that surface in the narratives of *Sisters in the Struggle*, such "consequences" serve in Brand's films as potent illustrations of "*the* world" and its material effects.

In the main, documentary's potential to effect socio-political change is reliant upon radical and radicalizing disclosure within mainstream, hegemonic forums; indeed, the instructive and persuasive capacity of documentary derives from a transgressive and hybrid mechanism that juxtaposes contrary class and political allegiances by means of its characteristic infiltration of audience boundaries—race, gender, class, geography, politics, and sexuality. The juxtaposition of "[t]hese differences construct[s] a spectator whose position is located within history," Rabinowitz claims, "essentially remaking the relationship of truth to ideology by insisting on advocacy rather than objectivity" (7). Continues Rabinowitz:

> The subject produced and provoked by documentary … is a subject of (potential) agency, an actor in history. And the performance of the documentary is precisely to remand, if not actively remake, the subject into a historical agent. Oddly, then, documentary rhetoric—despite being overlaid with a gloss of objectivity gleaned from its assignation as nonfiction, hence historical, factual, and thus presumably objective—also derives from agitprop. Its function is to induce feeling, thought, and action. (8)

For the project of fostering agency within Black Canadians, and for the dissemination of Black experience within Canada in order to benefit and educate Blacks and non-Blacks alike, Brand's documentaries highlight the discrepancies between "*the* world" of Black herstory, which her subjects embody, and the impoverished historical record of Black women's contributions in Canada produced by those who shape the country's official nation-narratives. To the extent that Rabinowitz rightly infers that documentary's "function is to induce feeling, thought, and action," it is also true that the third feature of this triple bill is most difficult to achieve and therefore must be motivated by the provocative pairing of its two siblings. The narrative of the subject embedded in history is just such an influential source of thought and feeling.

In his introduction to *Room for Maneuver: Reading (the) Oppositional (in) Narrative*, Ross Chambers seeks to describe whence, in text, the influence to motivate oppositional behaviour stems; he links it to shifts in desires that are provoked by oppositional narrative. He writes: "[I]n the universe of discourse, which is that of human 'reality,' oppositional behaviour has a particular potential to change states of affairs, by changing people's 'mentalities' (their ideas, attitudes, values, and feelings, which I take to be ultimately manifestations of *desire*), a potential that is not available to 'other' forms of oppositional practice" (1). Brand's engagement and education of viewers, by means of documentary, positions them as potential agents of change by means of altering their "*desire*," in a positive sense, to promote the equitable attribution of social rights and recognition to Black Canadian women. She can accomplish this because her films substitute "oppositional authority" (Chambers 1) for traditional figureheads: *talking heads*, in film and television vernacular. Barbara Halpern Martineau posits that the potency of such displacements lie in the distinction between "the use of talking heads to represent some official or authoritative position, and the use of talking heads of people who are telling their own stories" (259). Brand's work effectively augments what can be know about "*the* world," in Nichols's phrase, by "giving voice to a perspective which had previously gone unrepresented" (Martineau 258). It is documentary film that facilitates the deployment of that non-mimetic representation.

Women at the Well: A Film Series

The prime advance secured by Brand's first three films, of which she was instigator and director, is the claim they stake on territory within Canada's ostensibly homogeneous, that is to say European, racial core.[1] Significantly, it is from within and out of the National Film Board (NFB) that Black women's enduring voices, previously unrepresented, are broadcast. The innovation and historical significance of the films is notable in several respects: three of Brand's films are among the first of four to receive NFB production support and funding for the purpose of examining the subject of Black women's lives through documentary;[2] they are the earliest films that seek to reflect concerns, experiences, and socio-historical contexts of Black women in Canada, across generations and political standpoints; and finally, they make the images of Blacks in Canada public and visible, and thereby rupture the de facto veil of invisibility and silence that had, for the most part, masked Black national presence and contributions.[3] It must be noted that the insistence of these films upon the material, corporeal presence of Blacks in Canada was unprecedented as late as 1990 when the first of the films debuted, particularly in an era when roles played by Blacks on large and small screens in the mainstream remained essentialist, reductive, and in the main served to consolidate white hegemony.

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[1] The directorial influence Brand exerted over the *Women at the Well* project increased as her skills developed over the course of the project's development: she served as associate director with director Claire Prieto, for *Older Stronger Wiser*; Brand co-directed *Sisters in the Struggle* with Ginny Stikeman; and she was sole director of *Long Time Comin'*. The shift toward more explicitly socio-political content in *Sisters in the Struggle*, and emphasis on articulating a lesbian-artist aesthetic in *Long Time Comin'*, might be interpreted as a consequence of Brand exercising greater directorial control.

[2] The fourth of these films was *Black Mother Black Daughter* and was co-directed by Sylvia Hamilton and Claire Prieto. "Some of the women in the film include: the late Edith Clayton, a basket weaver; Pearleen Oliver, a researcher and historian; Dr. Marie Hamilton, an educator; and Daureen Lewis, former mayor of Annapolis Royal" (Barbara Mitchell 2).

Older Stronger Wiser (1989), *Sisters in the Struggle* (1991), and *Long Time Comin'* (1993) cut the first inroads into a visual territory long barren of the images of Black Canadians. The scarcity of those images belied the longstanding, historical presence of Blacks in Canada, a reality Brand rectifies, in part, with release of the films. The three documentaries are a first step toward the construction of the indispensable contextual framework necessary to show up conditions encountered by African Canadian women during the twentieth century (albeit principally in Toronto). In interview, Brand acknowledges the need for Black representation on screen in the late 1980s and early 1990s:

> [I]t was true, in fact, that there were very few if any—none, let's be frank—images of Blacks on … Canadian television. Still aren't. And there was *very* little hint of Black presence in Canada at all in that medium. Or any other medium, right? …And it's *still* the same; it's still *relatively* the same. There were

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[3] Some exceptions to media silence did exist in the mid-1800s. Such exceptions were often the result of the efforts of Black publishers of small newspapers, including Henry Bibb, who "established *The Voice of the Fugitive* newspaper (1851–3) in Sandwich, Canada West" (Shadd 46), and Mary Ann Shadd Carry, who, with her family, published the *Provincial Freeman*, "first in Windsor, then Toronto, and then Chatham, Canada West, between 1853 and 1859" (57).

> images of African *Americans* on television, and those were problematic also for African Americans as well as African Canadians who saw, whose only reference was that, too. So it did seem possible to, sort of, put these faces on this film that would cut through that, that empty space, if you will. So that was just the *hunger* that obviously I observed in the community that I lived in in Toronto for any sign of themselves. (*laughter*) For *any* sign of themselves. (Personal interview)

The films' corrective contribution to the emendation of the basic deficiency of Canada's Black visual record is substantial, as it provides for a population with an acute need of visual self-reflection, representation, and affirmation.

The visual quiddity of film's medium is, itself, a vital component of the power of these films to portray a vision—and a version—of Blackness not often manifest in the public visual discourse of television or mainstream film. Robyn Wiegman, writing in *American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender*, examines the shifting technologies of inscription and portrayal that effectively manage viewers' perceptions of race. She writes:

> Here one turns to cinema, television, and video where the circulation of representational images partake in a panoptic terrain by serving up [Black] bodies as narrative commodities, detached from the old economy of corporeal enslavement and situated instead in the panoply of signs, texts, and images through which the discourse of race functions now to affirm the referential illusion of the organic real. (41)

The narrative commodities of Black bodies Wiegman references comprise layers of significations and socially constituted connotations that transform the corporeal body into a set of readings and, thereby, operate to contain its potential to exceed imposed classifications. Wiegman goes on to suggest, "the primary characteristic of the modern panoptic regime is its reliance on a visual production that exceeds the limited boundaries of the eye" (41). Clearly, "cinema, television, and video" embody the supreme technical capacity to brand the body, in a comprehensive and prescriptive sense, in order to codify and regulate its social significations. The ubiquity of these visual mediums, combined with the hegemonically determined nature of their representations, in effect shape mainstream, common-sense readings of race.

Wiegman proposes that the "visible economies" that invest individual and racial subjectivities and characteristics with symbolic capital (or, arguably, divest them of symbolic value), "too often feature integration without equality, representation without power, [and] presence without the confirming possibility of emancipation" (41). In this respect, Brand's films posit visually discrepant projections of Black women who assert not only the possibility of emancipation, but also the righteous insistence that commands it be so. These documentaries focus principally on the non-corporeal aspects of their subjects: the intellectual, activist, artistic, pragmatic, and innovative aspects of their modes of thinking and actions. As a result, the fact of Blackness of these women's bodies is rendered as being secondary importance—albeit temporarily—to "power[ful] and emancipat[ed]" minds. This remains the case insofar as the women in Brand's films are seen to be the intellectual equals of (and moral superiors to) the manufactured ideological frameworks that white racist culture must employ to discredit and dehumanize them. The visual impact of the films' images of articulate, committed, and astute Black women is a powerful antidote to the deprecating and reductive representations orchestrated by hegemonically-aligned media sources that seek to reinscribe significations of deficiency.

Even as the intellectual capacity of Brand's subjects is the focus of her attention, so too is the visual representations of Blacks. After all, the fact of Blackness, and the constructed "visual density" of its sign (Wiegman 42), is simultaneously the superficial, potent, and instantaneous marker of difference. The visual representation of Blackness, conjoined with intellectual and ethical discernment, is an essential component in deconstructing the framing economies of race and gender.

The visual manifestation of Blacks as existing within Canadian society is necessitated by the peculiar kind of absence that race-bound labour practices enforce. In *Sisters in the Struggle*, Linda Carty notes her epiphany about when and where Black women appear in Toronto. She recalls:

> I remember when I used to work, you know, part-time in hospitals, and I'm coming home. Midnight. *Always* when the subway opens, and the subway cars open: Black women coming in. Similarly, if you're going to work—six o'clock in the morning, five-thirty in the morning: Black women getting out of the subway. Always, and you look, and these are *older* women. And you look and you say, "God, these are all mothers and grandmothers. What the hell are they doing?" Like, when the whole world, when the perfect white world in this country is asleep, Black women are working. (*SS* 363)

When Black women work night shifts, cleaning office towers in downtown Toronto from midnight to six, they constitute a workforce that is in all likelihood is invisible, as Carty's observation implies, to the white labour force that occupies that same space during daylight hours. With Carty's remarks on the subject, Brand and Ginny Stikeman (co-directors of *Sisters in the Struggle*) juxtapose film footage of Blacks walking along crowded Toronto streets. The objective of the Women at the Well films is not merely to displace denigrating images of Blacks with the intonations of positive intellectual, activist perspicacity, then; it is to assert the visual presence of Blacks into the "visible economies" that come to delimit popular perceptions of the city's racial makeup.

Studio D and oppositional opportunism

Brand's opportunity to pursue her documentary projects grew from feminist concerns that began to coalesce within the NFB itself, specifically among the managers of the women's unit, Studio D. Nascent among white feminists who occupied positions of authority in the studio was the impulse to identify and flesh out feminist agendas that were being raised beyond the sightlines of the NFB's mainstream focus, and outside those of white feminism. Describing the institutional conditions that enable the introduction of this kind of initiative, Brand comments, "it [is] always in the interstices where, *because* of certain social movements, certain institutions are pressed at various points; given the circumstances, they are pressed at certain points to open those places for those movements and … [to] absorb those movements." Fortunately, Brand points out, "Studio D and feminists in the studio … were [themselves] struggling with questions of race and gender, and class. And saying we need to do *these* kinds of things"; teasing out and "troubling the ideas of gender and race … opened that bridge to the making of the films." Given that such an opportunity is too often transitory, is the gift of a certain era, it was clear to Brand the opportunity must be taken advantage of: "I thought that if the film board, the women's studio, which hadn't done such a project before, was willing to do such a project then I felt that it was time to do such a project, that I should be [willing].... That space had to be used to do that" (Personal interview). It was at this point that Brand invited Claire Prieto to co-direct *Older Stronger Wiser*.[4]

Brand's pragmatic acceptance of Studio D's tender is characteristic of what Chambers identifies as "[o]ppositional behaviour"; this, he argues, "consists of individual or group survival tactics that do not challenge the power in place, but make use of circumstances set up by that power for purposes that power may ignore or deny" (1).[5] Of the outwardly contrary agendas behind the NFB's nation-conservation function and Studio D's goal to challenge the formative roles of race and gender within the Canadian institution, Chambers proposes it is precisely this type of fracture within state apparatus that enables tactical interventions of opposition. Drawing on the work of De Certeau, Chambers argues the "useful distinction between *strategy*, which is the behavior of those in control of a given situation, and *tactics* as the art of existing in territory that is occupied by an other"; as such, "oppositional behavior is a perpetual recourse to tactics."[6] Though necessarily eclectic and opportunistic, oppositional behaviour is governed by the deployment of "the characteristics of power *against* the power and *for* one's own purposes" (10). The opportunistic moment that enabled Brand's films—an opportunity spawned by a system required to regulate resistance against itself—certainly appears to meet Chambers' criteria in this regard. As Brand herself acknowledges of the process, "I slipped into it, I really did; I didn't consider myself a film-*maker* or even *interested* in film" (*laughter*); "I can't claim that there was any method … to what happened. It came up, but then I thought, well yeah, that would be interesting to do" (Personal interview). To the degree that opportunities for intervention present themselves, they amount to nought if no one is prepared to exploit their presence.

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[4] In the mid-1970s, few pioneering Black film directors existed. They included Claire Prieto, Rodger McTair, and Jennifer Hodges.

[5] In contrast with oppositional behaviour, "revolution," Chambers contends, "is a mode of *resistance* to forms of power it [viz. a given group] regards as illegitimate, that is, as a force that needs to be opposed by a counterforce" (1).

[6] Chambers, a-la De Certeau, points out that the oppositional "cannot become strategic without simultaneously losing its oppositional quality" (Introduction 10).

Cognizant of the deficit in Black representation in Canadian film and television, Brand negotiated in 1988 with Studio D to produce a series of three films. The negotiation was necessary in order to circumvent the primary pitfall of traditional NFB programming that was directed by conservative priorities and threatened to relegate coverage of Blacks in film to a single instalment. Apprehensive of the practices of Canadian state institutions that obscured and tokenized people of colour (a subject I will address more directly in Chapter 3), Brand contracted a three-documentary series so that each film might address different facets of Black Canadian culture and history, social and artistic practices. Brand remarks of the initial process: "When I negotiated for the whole thing, for the series, I thought it should be a series. Because I thought this is another feature of how Black presence is recorded that I had to counter; that is, that there would be *a* film" (Personal interview).[7] In the initial proposal submitted to the NFB, "Women at the Well: A Film Series," Brand and Prieto argue that because there had been "no film documenting any aspect of Black women's lives," and consequently "[t]heir contribution to community work, community activism, the raising of families and working outside the home still remain[ed] hidden" (1), the subject matter and opportunity compelled a more expansive approach.[8]

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[7] Mirroring Brand's anxiety, Martineau warns against the NFB's privileging of "extraordinary portrait[s]": "by ensuring that a range of attitudes and actions are presented as their subjects … films avoid the 'extraordinary portrait' syndrome so dear to the hearts of tokenists and beloved of the National Film Bored [sic]" (263).

Speaking of the project, Brand recalls her thinking at the time:

> [There was] *so* much work to be done … I couldn't sort of negotiate just for one half-hour film. It just wouldn't be [enough]. So it was early at that point that we negotiated the funding for the series of films. 'Cause even if we approached this first idea [viz. *Older Stronger Wiser*], which was a kind of re-collecting, kind of oral history, it wasn't enough. We could only have dealt with so very small a space, a piece. (Personal interview)

The result was the Women at the Well series. *Older Stronger Wiser* comprises the portraits of five older Black women who, from the 1920s through the 1950s, made substantial social contributions within their respective communities and provide models of opposition. *Sisters in the Struggle* generates a collage of discussions and images to contextualize, socially and historically, the outstanding issues that politically active Black women confronted in their involvement with the Black Power and civil rights movements in Canada; as well, it highlights conflicts with a white feminist movement that tended to homogenize and de-racialize feminist concerns and alienated Black women as a result. *Long Time Comin'* explores in a discursive fashion the work of two lesbian activist artists and their furtherance of a Black artistic tradition, one that views art as indistinct and inseparable from the struggles that characterize Black life. "The thread running through the series," write Prieto and Brand, "is the thread of survival and resistence [sic] and whichever ways in which those manifest themselves in Black women's lives" ("Women at the Well" 3). These three documentaries, in company with Sylvia Hamilton and Claire Prieto's *Black Mother Black Daughter* (1989), were in fact the first films made in Canada about African Canadians and thus the first to make images of Black Canadians accessible and visible in a broad social and critical context.[9]

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[8] "Women at the Well," the series title, refers to the Black women's benevolent society that saw its beginning in Nova Scotia in the 1800s. In their proposal, Brand and Prieto outline the rationale behind their selection of the name: "It was one of the earliest Black women's organisations and formed in order to give assistance to Black families in need. This early symbol of activism against unequal and hostile conditions codes Black women's experiences throughout their history in Canada" ("Women at the Well: a Film Series" 2).

The importance of Brand's films as a partial response to the finely-honed need within Black communities to witness their own presence in the Canadian context was substantial. A response had to be formulated that would reflect and affirm Black presence. "So to that extent film—making the film—was important," Brand notes, "making it *as* film was important because there you had an audience who were, just like the general audience, less inclined to read books than to watch film, even if documentary and art films generally appeal to more literate audiences. And film image had become so important in that Toronto milieu ... just *life* in the city of Toronto" (Personal interview). Black Toronto's response to *Older Stronger Wiser* confirmed Brand's assessment of the need for such a film.

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[9] Both produced by Studio D, of the National Film Board, *Older Stronger Wiser* and *Black Mother Black Daughter* premièred during Black History Month in February 1990. The films opened together for single screenings in Calgary, Edmonton, Toronto, Ottawa, and Montreal. A second screening was required in Toronto in response to remarkable public interest, predominantly Black. In Winnipeg, the films received separate screenings; in Halifax *Older Stronger Wiser* opened independently.

Older Stronger Wiser: women "So rarely honoured for their commitment and struggle...."

As accounts of individuals, movements, and traditions, Brand's documentaries inevitably perform on many levels. *Older Stronger Wiser*, in particular, attends to the social work of older Black women who cultivated and shaped Black communities through their participation in politics and the church, and with the establishment and maintenance of cultural associations. The film functions as a public tribute to—and record of—the lives of five Black women: Dolores Shadd, Reverend Addie Aylestock, Grace Fowler, Gwen Johnston, and Eva Smith. Brand briefly outlines the driving force behind the film in an early promotional interview: "I wanted to pay a debt to older Black women for their struggle, most often waged in silence, for what they had taught me about not accepting the lot of Black women and Black people. I think that they absorbed most of the pain of Black life and I wanted to make a film of healing for them and for us" ("An Interview with Dionne Brand, Associate Director..." 2). The five prolonged segments each focus on one individual, and the taut but unhurried pace of the film establishes a suitably reverential impression.

Older Stronger Wiser does differ from its sister films in that it pays homage to women who, although still active in a range of causes at the time of filming, represent a generation for which there are practically no national records and which therefore runs the risk of slipping entirely from Canadian consciousness. As public testimony, then, the film proves a timely document, prompted by the necessity of recording these women's experiences before their lessons and herstories are lost. "I thought to recover those voices would be good, and to put them down," Brand recalls, "because all these women were aging and they would pass and we would [still] have these stories. I mean their own *mothers* had passed, so we already lost a whole bunch" (Personal interview). The urgency of recording lives like that of Eva Smith—a 1956 Jamaican immigrant on the Domestic Workers Scheme who helped establish the Caribbean Outreach Program in North York's Jane-Finch housing projects—or that of Reverend Addie Aylestock—the first Black woman to be ordained in Canada, in 1951, by special resolution of the British Methodist Episcopal (BME) Conference of Churches in Canada,[10] for which she served as general secretary for twenty-four years—becomes all the more evident given that their contributions remain unrecorded by mainstream historical institutions and are, therefore, beyond the scope of most Canadians' social consciousness.

According to Ginny Stikeman, *Older Stronger Wiser*'s producer and editor, a sizable gulf existed as recently as 1989 between official records of the nation's history—as gathered by Canada's National Archives—and the daily existence of Black women. Asked whether insufficient documentation made production difficult, Ginny Stikeman responds affirmatively:

> There was nothing in the public archives portraying Black women. When Grace Fowler tells of working in a munitions plant during the war, we wanted to illustrate with shots but we couldn't. The National Archives has lots of photos but not of Black women, so we had to get the photos from individual women's

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[10] Rev. Aylestock was made a consecrated deaconess of the British Methodist Episcopal Conference in 1944, one year prior to her graduation from the Toronto Bible College. The special resolution that allowed for the ordination of women was passed in 1950.

> albums. That was the biggest problem we had. ("An Interview with Dionne Brand, Associate Director..." 1)

Prieto and Brand initially proposed the series "be a collection of personal histories, interviews knitted together in a chronology, interspersed with still photographs and newspaper items, old and contemporary. This format," they argued, "will involve the viewer in the times, as well as present the personal histories of Black-Canadian working women in their contexts" ("Women at the Well" 3). In fact, this vision—an apparatus of visual records as a means to place individuals temporally and socially—would only come to fruition with the release of *Sisters in the Struggle*, in which photographs, newspaper clippings, and live film footage are combined to weave a provocative tapestry that locates the actors in time, place, and social consciousness. The scarcity of artefacts evocative of *Older Stronger Wiser*'s generation betrays an incorrigibly narrow vision of (exclusive) social community and a deficient reading of the nation as exercised by mainstream cultural institutions. It is against this backdrop—at root, a Eurocentric conception and documentation of Canada—that the organic-intellectual nature of Brand's film series emerges.

As I have suggested, Brand's non-fiction work operates through two basic processes: that of mapping the formation of Canadian Black women's subjectivities within socio-historical contexts, and by promoting critical consciousness of the processes of social construction, particularly as that consciousness is enabled by the language of those who live it.[11] Ideally, the pedagogical fallout from this combination of practices—deconstruction and disclosure—is heightened critical awareness among subjugated peoples of the social structures and restrictions variously imposed on them by the state.

Older Stronger Wiser acknowledges the debt owed to an earlier generation of Black Canadian women by cultivating knowledge of herstorical circumstances and of the tactics mobilized to survive and improve daily living conditions. The three Women at the Well films survey the self-empowerment and proactive engagement of women who oppose racism and sexism through the exercise of tactical resistance. Prieto and Brand write of Canadian Black women: "[T]hey are and have been integral in sustaining the ethos of that [Black] community in passing on matrilinially … resistances to racism, sexism and class exploitation" ("Women at the Well" 1). "They have also created skills to navigate themselves around or through the commonplaceness of racism in the society" (2). Rabinowitz contends that films like *Older Stronger Wiser*, which "invoke the authenticity of experience through the first person—the talking head," and "divert the spectator from the object of documentary toward the subject of the narrative—a subject with whom the spectator can identify as the source of truth, as the authority" (12). Documentation of the fortitude of these women, as much as the survival tactics they deploy, signifies identifiable, sympathetic role models.

Although the women of *Older Stronger Wiser* discuss the social and economic conditions in which they lived, from the 1920s to the 1960s, their discourse is marked by an absence of explicitly political or theoretical vocabulary to explain either the systemic entrenchment or the mechanics of sexism, racism, or class. (Certainly this is true in comparison with the critically-articulate, counterhegemonic discourse that *Sisters in the Struggle* and *Long Time Comin'* comprise.) Nevertheless, factual accounts and anecdotes reveal a broad spectrum of restrictions imposed on, and omissions of, civil rights in the areas of access to diversified labour, just treatment at the hands of employers, and uniform wage standards. Grace Fowler's remarks come nearest to an analysis of class when she pledges to "fight for the underdog" because, as she phrases it, "[t]he working man needs all the help he can get, 'cause he's carrying this country on his back" (*OSW* 351). Her service as the Kent County New Democratic Party (NDP) president, and her organization of a local chapter of the Service Employees International Union in a Chatham, Ontario, hospital, evince her dedication.[12]

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[11] Brand's goal to promote familiarity with the circumstances of Black women's social construction is more explicitly and theoretically articulate in her non-fiction material, as befits sociological writing.

Fowler's account in *Older Stronger Wiser* of her hunt for housing, with her husband, locates the pair in "*the* world" of 1940s Toronto, segregated by race and class. Hers is a narrative that betrays an intimate, ongoing knowledge of racism as that force which determines access to the most basic requirements, and that triggers—inescapably as skin, and without compunction—the small-minded and intrusive reactions of whites to her presence. Fowler shares her experience:

> I know there's prejudice all over Canada, but I never ran into prejudice in Winnipeg like I did in Toronto. I remember one time, I'd just come back to work … took a week off, to try to find another place to live. And I had been knocking on doors, having doors slammed in my face. One day after we'd been out all day

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[12] Fowler was a founding member of Local 210, which began to organize in 1967, and won its first contract in 1968. Fowler was chief steward from 1972 until she retired in 1984 (*NBC* 192).

> long, I got on the street car right at, oh, 5 o'clock, you know, when everybody's gettin' off work. Hanging on a strap. I'm tired, I'm frustrated, I'm angry, and then some *clown* in the back of the streetcar says, "That's the first time I saw a nigger with freckles." I was goin' down there and *snatch* somebody, but my husband said, "Just ignore them, they're all ignorant." (*OSW* 350)

Immediately apparent in this account is Fowler's familiarity with racism as a ubiquitous phenomenon, one that during the Depression and the war years developed its most virulent and intolerant strain in the large cities to which many Blacks migrated to find work, as did others in the country. That Fowler must leave work for a *week* in order to find a place to live, even with her husband also active in the search, underscores the oppressive hostility she must have met with. Her depiction—"having doors *slammed* in my face" (my emphasis)—evokes the emotional slap-in-the-face of rejection at each door's closing; it conveys the dead-end sense of frustration that characterized her experience and had, inescapably, to be confronted. The fullness of the streetcar, as "everybody's gettin' off work," is a reminder of the wages Fowler has had to forego simply to find lodgings.

Frustration and anger are predictable reactions to rude rejection, and the insult directed at Fowler from the streetcar's depths points up the ubiquitous discourse of racism with which she is constantly assaulted, the detritus of ignorance that cannot, unlike work, be left behind at day's end. As with the rejection she confronts at each household during the day, Fowler's building fury over the insults and stereotyping she cannot control must be reined in, rationalized as meaningless stupidity, in order to maintain a socially mandated civility. Her husband's advice to her reflects his own expertise with racism, the tactics of separatism, and the self-care he has had to exercise.

Brand suggests shared experiences with racism serve to bond rather than differentiate women's from men's interests, an observation borne out by the Fowlers' shared housing search, necessity, and frustration:

> [I]t is quite possible, indeed probable, that Black women themselves did not see their condition as different from that of Black men.... The patriarchal structures which underlie political, economic and social life were not the subject of their daily preoccupations and were rarely the subject of internal quarrels in the Black community, at least never to the extent of occasioning a schism. ("No Burden" 19)

That said, the narratives of *Older Stronger Wiser* demonstrate that race- and gender-bound labour did in fact divide women's working experience from men's.

Day-to-day survival often demanded that young girls take up outside work so they might contribute financially to their families, even at the cost of leaving school. During the Depression, Fowler, at fourteen, began "working for board and room and clothes" as "a farm help" (*OSW* 349). Gwen Johnston also went to work, leaving school behind. "For her great-grandmother, her grandmother, her mother, for Gwen, and most black women in those days," Brand's narration reads, "domestic work was the only work available. And for them labour outside the home was a necessity" (*OSW* 354). Johnston, initiated into domestic work in 1929, affirms Brand's observation:

> There was very little money at home, so I just quit school and went to work. I started working, oh, I guess about at age fifteen. And luckily, I did have fairly

> good people to work for. My mother was very fussy about *who* I would go to work for. She told me a lot of things to watch for; and people who she thought would take advantage she'd say, "No, don't take that job." So, I did have some places that were quite nice, some families that had small children. And I looked after the children, but I did everything else, too: the cooking and… they did have usually somebody to come in and do the heavy cleaning. (*OSW* 354)

The potential for abuse and exploitation of child labourers is a palpable concern revealed in Johnston's mother's shepherding of her. The irony of Johnston's need to end her schooling in order to earn a wage while she cared for white children borders on appalling. The evolution of the child house-servant, responsible for the care of the plantation-master's children during the time of slavery, is not difficult to glimpse in Johnston's more contemporary situation. She continues:

> Twenty-five dollars a month was considered a fairly good wage. Before that you sort of had to work up to twenty-five dollars a month; before that it was even less. Also, the women who went out and worked by the day: they earned a dollar a day, and carfare. Sometimes they were given their lunch, sometimes they weren't. And they worked *very* hard: they would be expected to come in and clean a whole house in some cases. In a day. For a dollar a day. Can you imagine that? Very, very, very hard work. (*OSW* 354)

Such a tremendous amount of toil, rewarded with a bare minimum of payment, demonstrates the near-total lack of control Black women exercised over the conditions and products of their labour. Women without the benefits of long-term employment risked increased exploitation, much like piece-workers in a factory; Johnston's trebled application of the adjective conveys both admiration for and commiseration with those women.

Black women's dependence on resolutely race-bound domestic service prior to the Second World War permitted white households to determine wages and working conditions as they saw fit. Writing in part one of "Black Women and Work: The Impact of Racially Constructed Gender Roles on the Sexual Division of Labour," Brand points to this unevenness as one feature of the "adhocary" of "Black women's work" (36). Because "domestic work [was] conducted and contracted super-privately," usually within the confines of a single-family home, wages, benefits, and other elements varied greatly: carfare or meals might or might not be provided for; in some cases second-hand clothes would substitute for wages, or wages could be withheld arbitrarily if an employer was either unsatisfied with work rendered or was especially miserly. In all cases, any bargaining or negotiation was conducted on an individual basis, sans union support, and without the benefit of formal labour standards to govern outcomes.

The culture of control and abuse of power exercised by white employers affected Black domestics into and beyond the 1950s with the introduction of the West Indian Domestic Workers Scheme in 1955.[13] Eva Smith, a recruit in the scheme's first year, describes some of the conditions experienced by women like her:

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[13] Full-fledged recruitment of West Indian women for The Domestic Scheme began in 1955. The programme sought women between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five to perform domestic labour. Conditions experienced by many women were marred by over-work, ill treatment at the hands of their employers, and the withholding of legitimately earned wages.

> The salary was, for most people, sixty dollars a month. Fifteen dollars a week![14] And there were people who… you had to be up—and though you live in the same house—when the employer, husband and wife gone out, and you're babysitting, even if it's until six o'clock in the morning—you better be sitting up when they arrive. And you must be up, also, at seven o'clock to get breakfast. And so those were some of the things: people weren't getting proper time off, there was no one to speak up for them. (*OSW* 355)

An unidentified woman in *Older Stronger Wiser*, with whom Smith ruminates, adds, "[p]eople had their passports taken away from them, their clothing taken away, and they couldn't go out, unless they went out with the employer. And you know, things like shovelling snow in a little sweater and sandals" (355). The sense of powerlessness must have been devastating.

Smith's anxiety over the non-existence of advocacy or support networks of any sort, combined with the improbability of securing legal recourse against abuse or exploitative working conditions, accentuates the importance of Smith's family maxim: "What hurt one of us, hurt all of us." This mantra she passed to Black youth whom she taught in the Caribbean Outreach Program, the programme she co-instigated in the mid-1970s and volunteered with for more than twenty years while she maintained full-time work elsewhere. Appropriately, Smith's thoughts about the relevance of this axiom to the children she taught are the words that bring *Older Stronger Wiser* to a close:

> There was a rule in my family: what hurt one of us hurt all of us. And that attitude I have taken with me and have helped the kids to understand. Even,

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[14] Between 1929 and 1955, wages for one month's labour rose by only $35.

> sometimes, I remember, students who are at an advanced level—there's always a feeling that, "Well, I'm not a part of those kids." And I always say to them: "When you walk down the corridor, the first thing that comes to someone's mind: You are a Black child. They don't stop to ask whether you are in advance, whether you're from Jamaica, whether you're from Trinidad, or whether you're a Canadian. You're all in the same boat. Therefore: what hurt one of us, hurt all of us. (357)

The benefit of Smith's cultivation of cultural coalition in the guise of teaching Black heritage is two-fold. The immediate gain, in practical terms, is the provision of a safe space for young people to gather. Smith stresses this element of her programme when she says, "that Saturday morning program was an outlet for them, a place where they could go and feel at ease" (*OSW* 356). The long-term gain for Canadian-born and Caribbean-immigrant Black children is affirmative engagement with a historical and cultural identity otherwise stifled by Canada's public and private school systems.

The cultivation of an environment conducive to building Black self-awareness and self-esteem is essential where cultural and educational institutions de-emphasize or simply disregard their significance. Johnston faced this indifference as a young student: "When we were going to school here in Canada, there was nothing. We didn't come across any black books until we were in our late teens, early twenties really" (*OSW* 353). Hence, she and her husband, Leonard, founded and owned Toronto's Third World Books and Craft Store in 1969, at the height of the Black Power movement in that city. Johnston's voice conveys considerable excitement when she describes the role the bookstore played in that era and in the Black community: "The Sixties was a very exciting time for black people. The store was always full of people looking for information. They came to get books for themselves and for their children. And people brought the newspapers—community newspapers and flyers—to be distributed. We had a wonderful time at Third World" (*OSW* 353). Strongholds of Black culture and history such as Third World Books, Smith's outreach programme, and even the Women at the Well series, provide safeguards against the threatened disappearance and suppression of that history.

In opposition to systemic racism and sexism operative in Canada, particularly as these constraints regulated the educational and employment opportunities of Blacks from the 1920s through the 1960s and beyond, the efforts made by Shadd, Fowler, Aylestock, Johnston, and Smith have promoted local, meaningful, and enduring change for their own and subsequent generations. They forged community strength through political and union networks, enhanced self-esteem among Black youth, solidified a Black cultural foundation through its maintenance and dissemination, and aided the development of personal and psychic security for African Canadians in an at-best-indifferent social climate. "They are activists," write Prieto and Brand, "energetic and diligent, they embody and originate the ideas that change things" ("Women at the Well" 1). Moreover, their narratives, accessible via *Older Stronger Wiser*, can serve to consolidate communities of resistance.

Like Johnston, who "[i]n the Toronto of her childhood … knew that our [Black] people's past was missing" (*OSW* 353) from Canadian social and historical consciousness, Brand is keenly aware of this absence. *Older Stronger Wiser*, like its sister films, performs a mode of societal work beyond that of paying respects to five

Black women "[s]o rarely honoured for their commitment and struggle" (357), and beyond enabling previously muted voices to speak and be heard; as Karen Penny Morelyle suggests, "the work of Dionne Brand involves both the articulation and the encouragement of transformational narratives" (144). As a documentary, it holds up a kind of mirror to African Canadian communities in which survivors of racist and sexist political and economic structures are seen to challenge hegemonic barriers meant to contain and quash. Proactively engaged in their communities, these women are empowered by self-knowledge and -reflection. Put plainly, their visual presence is enabled by film. To paraphrase Brand's rhetorical response in interview with Dagmar Novak: if the history of your country is presented to you and you are absent from it, or the forms in which you are present are pejorative and crudely reductive, "then you know that this [history] means to erase you or kill you. Then you must [project] yourself" (Novak 273). Brand's documentaries render the visual equivalent of written herstory; they augment the "common stock of knowledge made-up of specific recipes for acting and interpreting the very world" Blacks must occupy (Salamini 97).

The significance of Brand's films as works that make Blacks visible to the public must not be overlooked. The paradox of Black presence in Canada lies in its simultaneous hyper-visibility and invisibility on a daily basis, not merely in the hidden and ill-acknowledged historical record of enduring Black presence in this country. The documentary images of active, politically engaged, savvy, and articulate Black women framed by Brand's films provide visual and psychic confirmation of a reality different from the narratives of crime and disempowerment propagated by news media and mainstream films. Brand's images operate to shift common perceptions of Blacks that have been calcified, in part, by hegemony's accumulation of damaging portrayals. The films must also operate to redress the absence of Blacks from daily encounters brought about by labour practices that result in the de facto segregation of races.

Documentary film and articulate criticism: *Sisters in the Struggle* and *Long Time Comin'*

Activist and member of the Toronto-based Black Action Defense Committee, Akua Benjamin launches *Sisters in the Struggle* with a declaration: "We have *always* had fighters in our community.… *that*, I think, is the basis of our survival—we have always had women doing the kinds of stuff that I have been doing. They're not in anybody's textbooks, they've not been celebrated in any degree, but I think that our survival, to a large extent, has depended on women" (359). Benjamin's statement brings to bear several rhetorical manoeuvres: she acknowledges the legacy of Black women's crucial and persistent skirmishes with the structures of racism and sexism that organize Canadian society; she identifies herself as an active participant among the ranks of women who work to alter those structures; and she points up the near-complete disavowal in Canada's nation-narratives of Black women's contributions, highlighting the paucity of cultural capital with which they are linked or invested by parastatal mainstays such as textbooks and the aforementioned National Archives.

The self-assured tenor of this opening salvo distinguishes *Sisters in the Struggle* from *Older Stronger Wiser*. Like *Long Time Comin'*, with which it shares stylistic and discursive elements, *Sisters in the Struggle* is an organic-intellectual project: a forum where Black women versed in the theory and praxis of socio-political intervention refine and articulate their critical analysis of hegemony as a force that directly affects them. Moreover, the theory and practices defined in the film are projected out of this forum to alert, inform, and instruct women similarly affected by mechanisms of containment. Rabinowitz, writing of contemporary, socially committed film, maintains, "increasingly political documentaries serve another representative function—that of self-definition. Radical reportage and documentary films often provide the Left, or its various subcultures, with a self-understanding. It represents itself to itself—an act of identity—as it represents its positions to a wider community—an act of recruitment" (11–12). Brand's vision of *Sisters in the Struggle*, that "[r]ather than personal biographies, the film will be a biography of an idea, an emerging movement, a philosophical debate," comes to fruition in the final product and resonates with Rabinowitz's description ("Film Proposal No. 2" 9).

Focused on events and circumstances that shape the socio-structural analyses devised by the women of *Sisters in the Struggle* and *Long Time Comin'*, the films document the evolution of Black feminist theory. At base, the articulation of their experience works to unite related interests; in practice, the articulation of theory promotes the destabilization of ingrained, common-sense knowledge and seemingly fixed social paradigms. The documentaries implicitly invite viewers to consider similarities of personal circumstance provoked by race, gender, class, and sexuality, and to encourage self-reflexive analysis. *Sisters in the Struggle* depicts the skirmishes, counterhegemonic assessment, and social concerns of a range of women—from British Columbian and Nova Scotian politicians to community and union activists from Vancouver and Montreal, straight and lesbian women, and members of Toronto's Black Women's Collective

(BWC). The film cultivates an expansive sense of association and shared commitment. The hegemonic critique that has led these women to develop race-, gender-, class-, and political-consciousness to a high degree—as well as lesbian-consciousness for some—provides an instructive model. *Long Time Comin'*, too, deals with the evolution of this tightly bound matrix of critique. Because *Long Time Comin'* centres on two explicitly lesbian artists—Faith Nolan, a blues musician, and Grace Channer, a sculptor, painter, and collage artist—the appeal of this film to a public not already involved in Black artistic expression or supportive of lesbian rights is, I would suggest, narrower.

Sisters in the Struggle and the discourse of change

Sisters in the Struggle addresses a range of issues central to Black women's empowerment, the majority of which locate their roots in the upsurge of the Black Power and feminist movements of the late 1960s. These issues remain contentious still. The film's central themes are multiple and include the following: the importance of establishing a politically homogeneous community that can facilitate the process of articulating the impacts of, and specifying responses to, racism, sexism, economic marginalization, and homophobia; foregrounding the manifest responsibility of social activism, and the need to confront capitalist structures that curb economic opportunities and choices for Black women; and highlighting the struggle for Black women's equitable representation and participation in shaping social discourse and directing the development of the Black Power and feminist movements.

Sisters in the Struggle evokes a strong sense of historical and ideological development while it relays the intensity of these women's commitment to bring down the barriers racism and sexism pose in their lives. It does so because it enlists the strengths of documentary film to highlight the personal, material nature of the issues Black women confront; too, it portrays the investment they have in overcoming systemic obstacles to equality. In the language of Martineau, a film such as this uses "talking heads as empowering devices, representing people who represent themselves, and thereby [demonstrate] that we are all capable of representing ourselves and acting upon our own interpretations of reality" (263). In common with participants in other committed documentaries, "[p]eople involved in the field"—in this instance Black women in Black activism—"are seen to articulate their sense of how it works in a way which is experienced by the audience as sharing" (265). The use of this tactic in *Sisters in the Struggle* "induce[s] feeling, thought, and action," as Rabinowitz has suggested.

Sisters in the Struggle has a synecdochal relationship with the Black Power and Black feminist movements that are at its core. The film serves as an effective introduction for those who kindle an initial interest in these movements; it serves also as a discursive model, highlighting the analysis and generation of theoretical and practical responses to racism and sexism. In "Women at the Well Series: Film Proposal No. 2," Brand twice emphasizes that although as many as seventeen speakers are involved, "the film is not biographical of each woman but topical" (11): "The women will be introduced by subtitles," she writes, "which will carry us speedily to the topical nature of the film" (9). The effect of this focus on foundational principles rather than on the individual narratives of specific women—on personal herstories—is to establish a sense of the broad scope of the two movements for the film's viewers. The documentary's concentration on pivotal issues conveys a sense of the movements' growing momentum, developing maturity, and pragmatic disposition; consequently, the film evokes the movements' accessibility—because it portrays women actually involved in political and social work, and optimistically so—since the conviction and dedication of its subjects is palpable.

In the film's proposal, Brand identifies several categories of suitable viewers. Her list first cites "Black women, especially young Black women who are dealing with the questions raised in the film" (11). Brand suggests as well that "[t]he film itself can become an organising tool for the movements." Unsurprisingly, the audience specified by Brand is predisposed on several fronts: such an audience is apt to identify strongly with the film's subjects; it stands to gain, potentially, considerable clarity from exposure to the discourse and experiences of contributors; and, based upon models the film represents, that audience's confidence in the need for theoretical and practical defiance of a discriminatory system is likely to intensify. I say *unsurprisingly* because this mode of introduction to and initiation in ideological non-compliance closely mirrors the social function of documentary as detailed by Rabinowitz; she reasons, "radical documentary constructs objects of radical desire: it depicts the subject and object of revolution to itself and through itself, producing an identity that both includes yet differs from its audience. This is a highly personal form which takes as its subject public affairs; but it is also a political practice which comes from private vision" (12). *Sisters in the Struggle* inevitably differentiates between the film's participants, on the one hand, and Black women (or other viewers) *out there* in the real world; however, it also marries the two groups, recruiting viewers from *out there* through its focus on common concerns while simultaneously arousing a radical desire for change—change the film implies can in fact be achieved, and is already in progress. Albeit extra-personal, the desired shift in "public affairs" that aims to benefit a given group does promise practical changes for the private individual and how she will encounter her world.

Rabinowitz's further observation about "[d]ocumentaries that repress the presence of the documentarian's voice or body," as *Sisters in the Struggle* does, is that they "posit a natural truth captured at random in words or images and seemingly open to direct consumption by the audience" (12). This is particularly descriptive of the film's footage of the Toronto BWC in conversation: their dialogue is spontaneous, invested, and interactive. It is difficult to doubt the veracity of their narratives or their practical intentions. While the BWC's discussion comprises "candid and frank opinion" ("Proposal No. 2" 9), the viewer cannot fail to grasp that their discussion turns on issues that remain contentious and oppressive. *Sisters in the Struggle* is certainly not a triumphal film so much as it is a "register or document of … challenges" that "Black women and Black feminists have posed to the women's movement and the Black movement in Canada" ("Proposal No. 2" 9). It is abundantly clear that any outstanding issues "are neither resolved nor static" (9). That said, the documentary could not be persuasive if it did not fix on the proactive engagement of its subjects and their successes.

Within a culture of pervasive racial and sexual discrimination, the inevitability of activism as an integral element of daily life became apparent at an early age to many women in *Sisters in the Struggle*. For Carol Allain, it was the BWC that enabled her to identify and direct toward political ends the anger she felt upon "looking around [her] and seeing the position that black people occupied in this country, and to take it further, seeing the position that black women had in the society." "I remember at that time" she says, "feeling angry, but not knowing what that feeling was" (372). Allain affirms, "when I met women from the collective, they named that feeling for me, and they also gave me an outlet where I could use that energy to work to change things. I mean, people always say that your anger immobilizes you, you know, but that's not true" (372). *Sisters in the Struggle* is certainly a film about anger and frustration; however, as a documentary on social transformation, it aims to tip anger into articulate criticism of the homogenizing effects of white feminism and of the pervasive patriarchy that structures the Black Power movement. This criticism establishes the basis for tactical resistance.

Political action is presented in *Sisters in the Struggle* not as optional but as an insistent, requisite mode of living in order to confront inequitable and unjust social conditions. While "feminism and anti-racism are practical questions" for Black women, Brand avers, they must balance themselves against "daily life and the feasibility of such ideas within the construction of daily life" ("Proposal No. 2" 10). The tactical feasibility of opposition confronts the fearsome possibility of fatality as the subaltern runs up against hegemonic power. This fact of Black Canadian life is manifest in the shady police killings of Buddy Evans, Albert Johnson, Lester Donaldson, and Anthony Griffin in the 1980s, and of the BWC's own Sophia Cook in 1989. Through participants' commentary and video footage of the rallies in Toronto staged to protest the impunity with which police were committing violence, the film underscores the immediate vulnerability of Black survival. "Here," Benjamin testifies, "if a kid gets out of line, he may end up dead" (*SS* 368). As a documentary, *Sisters in the Struggle* might be seen to stand in for the social potential of the vulnerable individual: it represents a union of voices that is invested (paradoxically) with the indirect authority of the state and with the means, by way of film and video, to propagate oppositional discourse.

Rabinowitz, reflecting on documentary's essential purpose, writes, "[w]hat is at stake, I believe, is the status, meaning, interpretation, and perhaps even control of history and its narratives. Documentaries, whether prose reports, moving or still images, demand narratives. The viewing subject, the talking head, the edited sequence, and the caption all tell stories" (7). *Sisters in the Struggle* broadcasts counterhegemonic narratives vital to the survival of its subjects; its effect, if only partial, is to correct by supplement white Canada's historical record via the insertion of Black narratives, heretofore untold and omitted. BWC member Leleti Tamu outlines the obligation to destabilize state narratives by speaking truth to power, by foregrounding counter-narratives. Although her declaration mainly concerns sexuality, it does resonate with all the film's essential signifiers of difference: "We take strong stands because we have nothing to lose and we've *made* that choice. So now it's not a matter of going in there and kissing anybody's ass, because we realise that if we don't say it, we are silenced, and silence in this case *does* mean death" (*SS* 381). *Sisters in the Struggle* provides a speaking platform from which previously neglected narratives are inaugurated into the public sphere to shatter an oppressive silence and stave off exclusion.

Long Time Comin' and arts of resistance

Long Time Comin' explores the stance of two Black artists who situate their work in a tradition that admits no substantial distinction between political practice, artistic value, and social issues of community. Art, whether music, painting, sculpture, or writing, serves to develop and give shape to critical consciousness; it is intended, also, to change the daily lives of those whom it touches. In the lives and work of Faith Nolan and

Grace Channer, Brand recognizes the commitment to "the project of freedom that Black people in the Americas have been engaged in for the past several hundred years" ("*Long Time Comin'*: Interview with the Director Dionne Brand"). For socially committed artists who came of age during the late 1960s Black Power movement, art is charged with the task of social truth-telling to better the existence of disenfranchised groups. Such was "the function of writing. The function of art, really," says Brand of her generation; "That is, I belonged to a community that saw all of its actions as working in the interest of that community, and of eradicating racism, of eradicating class" (Personal interview).

Suitably, *Long Time Comin'* highlights Channer's proactive involvement in shaping community, and shows her, for example, explain to a classroom of children a sculpture she has made. Nolan's efforts to advance a pro-feminist social agenda and to support the women's community also feature, as the film opens with her participation in a fundraising concert to aid construction of Camp SIS (a political education centre for women); she is later filmed singing to an assembly at a Take Back the Night rally. Channer and Nolan's conception of art as an integral facet of self-definition and social contribution parallels that of Brand's: "*Long Time Comin'* highlights their work, their politics, their lesbian sexuality, their insistence that their art sustain a relevant political edge" ("*Long Time Comin'*: Dionne Brand—Director's Biography"). As the director of a film such as this, Brand demonstrates her own commitment to community.

Brand's film, the third Women at the Well feature, exhibits an impulsive, inclusive approach to art as it integrates dance and poetry sequences by artists other than Nolan and Channer. The stepped-up layering of artistic forms in *Long Time Comin'* illustrates the growing skill Brand has achieved in manipulating the genre. In what she dubs "a docu-art film" ("Film Proposal No. 3" 5), she employs a wider range of filmic techniques and stylistic cues than appear in previous films: extreme close-ups insinuate intimacy, while high, low, and oblique camera angles are intended to "[signify] the artists [sic] oppositional view of the world" (6). Significantly, the populist nature of the film de-emphasizes the solitary, differentiated narratives of individuals and accentuates, through narrative association, a rich network of common threads: lesbian identification, political commitment, anti-establishment values, artistic integrity, and feminist analysis. "There will be no narration, but the artists' voices and images will construct the narrative," proposes Brand; "Fine details of [Channer's] paintings will be filmed to be interwoven as images in the narrative. The same for [Nolan's] music—as statements of the artist's politics, as statements of her views on the world—layered against city scapes [sic], the artist herself, her audience and some dramatic vignettes" (5–6). The associative nature of the film is determined by its own internal discourse.

One example of this layering of text, image, music, and dance begins with an extreme close-up view of Channer's canvas "Black Women's Work." As the title suggests, the piece is a collection of portraits of Black women. They appear sombre, by and large, and are engaged in various forms of labour or protest. Around the portraits runs text that points up the underlying disparity of wealth extant between women and men: "Women half the world one third the labour force do two-thirds the work. Have one-tenth world income and less than one one-hundredth world property" (*LTC* 390). Close-up shots focus on the small details of the canvas and upon the cheerless faces of the women depicted. The painting also serves as a filmic backdrop to alternating images and silhouettes of two Black women who dance with movements that reflect African traditions. The women dance to Nolan's song "Regina," the lyrics of which recount the killing of a violent john by a Black woman forced by poverty to prostitute herself. The lyrics tell of Regina's subjection to a racist legal system in which there is "no defence for killing a white man"; she is a victim at the centre of a catch-22 that "don't make no sense" (*LTC* 390). The economic imbalance that is the subject of Channer's "Black Women's Work" is augmented for Regina, a "welfare mother trying to make it on [her] own," upon whom "[f]our hundred years of slavery, surely leaves its toll" (390). The film sequence is bisected by Nolan's own story about growing up in a juke joint, the destructive raids visited by the police on her home, and her surprise that she did not land up in prison. The many layers of this collage—Channer's artwork and text, traditional Black dance, Nolan's music, lyrics, and personal narrative—combine to reflect a matrix of social and historical factors that contribute to and contextualize Regina's condition. "All of the visuals will also be self-conscious as narrative," Brand predicts of the images conjured in her "docu-art film," a vision *Listening for Something* effectively brings to fruition ("Proposal No. 3" 6).

For Nolan and Channer, art arises from lived conditions and necessarily binds itself to human struggle, drawing substance from this connection. Nolan disparages music that is "just about this 'love' that you could share in the air with somebody you didn't even know, but you were going to meet" (*LTC* 389); she demands her music play a part of social change. Citing earlier disaffection, Nolan describes the circumstances that drove her to incorporate social-conscience into her music:

> I have to have something to sing that I believe in. And for many years I sang songs that ... didn't mean anything to me. And I found myself very empty, very

> alone, and very unconnected. And so I wanted to sing what was connected and true. And the only music that has that is the people's music, music that comes from the people. And that music generally allies itself to change and change for the better.... They may call that social change music, but it's really just real music, about real things that are important. (*LTC* 387–88)

"The other stuff," charges Nolan, "is just bullshit music to keep people's minds empty." Not surprisingly, the thematic centre of Nolan's music is decidedly pro-feminist.

Active engagement with the needs and priorities of Toronto's women's communities brings Nolan's points of musical contact in line with Channer's assertion that as an artist "it's very important to be part of the community and its struggles, and its activism" (*LTC* 397). Nolan has made a practice of playing in prisons and does so because of the level of honesty and common ground she feels exists between her and the women she encounters there. She comments, "We're working-class together and when I talk about the man, they understand[,] whether its [sic] the state or male violence, they understand. And they can see how they can end up in there not because there's something wrong with them but because of the system.... Your survival depends on that level of honesty" ("Proposal No. 3" 11). Truth-telling in art about the reality of racial and sexual oppression is imperative when the culture at large disregards the impact and the structural nature of subjugation.

Channer understands her art as a means to define what is central to Black women. She holds that "men have for too long taken over our bodies, our minds, everything to do with us and are giving it back to us in a way that's totally alien to anything that is who we are as women.... I felt it's our time to start to rewrite, recreate ourselves," she adds (*LTC*

391). Arguably, the process is as much one of writing and creating anew as it is one of re-writing and re-creating. An artist that is allied to her community, Channer maintains, is a chief player in the creation of self-definition: "The importance of the artist in the Black community is to give voice for the Black community—right? 'Cause there's nowhere where we have voice, so everything we are and everything we do, whatever field we get into, it really is an expression of our community" (*LTC* 386). Channer envisions the role of the artist involved in articulating a distinct community's social and political agenda as a "voice [speaking] *for* the Black community" (emphasis added). In this role, Channer functions much as an organic intellectual, in sync with a subaltern constituency.

By claiming to speak "*for* the Black community," Channer assumes a representative capacity different from that which Brand identifies for herself when she speaks to Adrienne Rich in *Listening for Something*: "Concretely, what I think I'm doing when I am writing poetry," she says," is I think that I am speaking *to* Black people" (432, emphasis added). Perhaps Brand, the writer, is more alert to the implications of her language than is Channer, the painter and sculptor; Channer's phrasing implies a homogenous Black community reliant upon the artist to articulate their needs, whereas Brand's suggests a dialectical give and take that encourages the addressees to develop and refine their thinking. Nonetheless, both Brand and Channer have at heart the expression of Black experience: the former works to generate thoughtful responses to historical and contemporary constructions of Blackness, while the latter seeks to shape a future by producing new, positive projections of race and gender. These modes of expression serve to bring forward some of those narratives that have been obscured by hegemonically-sanctioned disinterest in, and omission of, Black history and culture.

A considerable portion of *Long Time Comin'* comprises frank discussion by and between Channer and Nolan about their experiences of identifying as lesbians, particularly in relation to the Black community, and of their maintenance of cultural ties to Blackness. Their refusal to remain silent about their lesbianism as a means to maintain social and political harmony within the historically homophobic Black population is a cornerstone of Nolan's and Channer's artistic output. This refusal also marks their interaction with audiences. Like other lesbian performers of her generation, Nolan experienced a personal turning point that determined where and when she would perform. She explains: "Being a singer is not unusual for a Black woman, it's true. Being an out lesbian Black singer is very unusual. I was always getting in trouble singing … you know … in different places. And I decided one day, well, I'm not [gonna] have any more trouble because I'm not playing any place where I can't be out as a lesbian" (*LTC* 397). Rather than deny her sexuality so that others (family, union workers, non-progressive audiences, and the like) might maintain their heterosexism unchallenged, she would choose where to perform to suit her own interests. Nolan's step toward separatist feminism marks a conscious decision to claim for herself and her art a space of personal integrity.

A significant contribution of *Long Time Comin'* and its partial focus on lesbianism is that the film makes public the kind of discussion about lesbianism that was long absent for Nolan and Channer, and doubtless many other Black women who questioned their sexuality. The film deepens the discussion with the inclusion of pro-

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lesbian poetry by Leleti Tamu and excerpts from two diarists, Carol Camper and Clarissa Chandler. Chandler's entries highlight the anxiety of isolation around being lesbian and Black particularly in the absence of a supportive community she values so highly: "My place is filled with the love, support and abuses of Black women … whom I have measured myself against. What would I feel inside if they suddenly never existed? The thought frightens me. It would be incomprehensible to only have yourself to measure Blackness against in a world that claims it doesn't exist" (*LTC* 401).

Rabinowitz suggests "Documentary circulates between the public and private, personal and political spheres by becoming simultaneously an aesthetic and archival object"(6). Certainly *Long Time Comin'* is both an aesthetic interpretation and an "archival object," one that captures a specific phase of social development within the Torontonian Black community. Brand's "docu-art film," however, "reinterprets the feminist cant that the personal is political" in order to demonstrate that "politics is not separate from the sensual, but arises out of the sensual" ("Proposal No. 3" 7). *Long Time Comin'* does not simply *out* Black lesbianism: it makes it visible and audible—as it is celebrated as a source of artistic and political resilience—despite a dominant patriarchal culture in this nation that cares not to know about it.

Listening for Something … Adrienne Rich and Dionne Brand in Conversation

In my discussion with Brand about the motivating impulses behind her four films, she agreed that *Listening for Something* (1996) arose from a yearning for an alternative focus. "*Listening for Something* was just me wanting to talk to somebody about poetry (*laughter*) after all these films … of social consequence," she revealed, "of that *kind* of social consequence" (Personal interview). The range and nature of the topics Adrienne Rich and Brand address in this fourth documentary reveal shifts in subject matter without any diminution of substance. The apparent defeat of socialism as an anti-racist, anti-sexist, and anti-class movement bent on the equal distribution of wealth; the homogenization of the world's cultures beneath the weight of American blockbuster media conglomerates like Time Warner; the value of poetry, in Rich's conception, as the genre least susceptible to commoditization; and the political and social basis for their individual commitments to poetry: these are among the subjects Brand and Rich discuss, often with passion combined with foreboding.

Listening for Something, like *Sisters in the Struggle* and *Long Time Comin'*, employs dialogue to focus on comparisons of experiences and influences. Unlike *Older Stronger Wiser*, no narrator introduces the film's subjects or contextualizes the discussion between the two speakers; Brand counts instead on her viewers' knowledge of twentieth-century historical and social currents—or, failing that, their ability to learn—to locate themselves in relation to the discussion. In fact, efforts are made to disentangle, even distance, the viewer from the documentary so that the film's narratives cannot simply be ingested without introspection. The implication of this contrivance is that the seeming transparency of documentary film's representative function must, like all ideologically communicative mediums, be scrutinized by the visual consumer for the purpose of exposing its ideological underpinnings. In this way, the film points up the impossibility of an apolitical perspective, even in the seemingly passive gaze of the viewer.

In her proposal for the film, Brand is firm that "no establishing shots [be used] for the sake of establishing [positionality], since the universe of the film will be constructed from the conversation and the poems"; indeed, there is "no deliberate attempt to allow the audience in" ("Adrienne Rich and Dionne Brand: In this Conversation for Life" 2). In this regard, *Listening for Something* reveals a structuralist bent, as it highlights the struggles of its subjects to locate themselves within distinct worlds, the tactics they have adapted to interpret these worlds, and the means by which they seek to influence the systems they are engaged with. As lesbian women in a patriarchal, homophobic century, and as socialists who live on the border of, or within, the world's paramount capitalist, imperialist power, the United States, Rich and Brand have been required to define, in opposition, the terms of their relationship to the components of this matrix. Mirroring the marginal social positions the two authors occupy, the viewer, external to the film, must also seek a way into the "conversation" already underway. Positioned thus, the viewer is induced to examine her ideological precepts and reconsider her thinking on the issues the film broaches, to interrogate accepted preconceptions.

Brand's fourth documentary induces the viewer to determine his or her own analysis of and stance relative to the issues taken up by the film. In this last documentary's proposal, "Adrienne Rich and Dionne Brand: In this Conversation for Life," Brand conjures a schematic that discourages any claim to a fixed perspective and that provokes regular reassessment of one's interpretations with regard to the poets' conversation, poetry, and integrated film images. "We construct and view the world through particular lenses depending on our sociopolitical and historical locations," Brand asserts. "The viewer will be forced to think about their own lens, their own angle of view, their own sociopolitical place because the visual treatment will not allow them to relax into the comfort of consuming" (1–2). Although *Listening for Something* is certainly not uncomfortable to watch, the film's constant slippage between discussion—which, itself, shifts themes—and the intercutting of poems—read by their respective authors and represented by thematically related film footage—exacts from the viewer attention to language and locus in order to ground her thinking.

The documentary's oscillation between black-and-white and colour footage is meant to further vex unthinking consumption of the film. "The conversations," suggest Brand, are "shot in black and white … to break the safety of colour." Use of "black and white also [establishes] a sense of urgency, seriousness" meant to dissuade the viewer from "[taking] colour for granted" (2). However, the distinction made through the use of colour and black and white footage that Brand initially proposed is blurred in the final product by the infusion of sepia tones into both spectrums. As a result, the black and white foundation is seen to underlie the fuller spectrum of colour: the distinction of the archetypal binary is belied by the symbolic potential for simultaneity. The implication is that while differences of geographical origin and settling, of age, race, and class have inevitably affected Brand's and Rich's political involvements and poetic output, their values and perceptions do ultimately interlock, founded as they are upon the same fundamental principles. To "take colour for granted" would be to assume, unchallenged, the world as familiar—without thought to the colouring effects of reason, recognition, distance, and acquaintance upon perception or interpretation; it would be to leave unconsidered alternative assessments inevitably interposed by socially-situated subjectivities and temporal locations.

Like *Long Time Comin'*, *Listening for Something* features poetry as an art form bound explicitly to everyday life, to political commitments. Poetry does not emerge as merely supplementary but forms fully half of the film's "conversation." Dialogue and poetry address the historical and political events of the last century that have bearing on the authors' social formation: the panic in the United States around communism, whipped to life by Senator McCarthy; the execution of the Rosenbergs in 1953; the Cuban revolution; the popular revolution in Grenada and the subsequent U.S. invasion in 1983 that destroyed it. Archival film footage documents the events themselves and the original sounds recorded with that footage are permitted to seep through poetry voiceovers. Brand's and Rich's poems also take account of their individual struggles to carve authentic lives in woman-hostile, predatory, and homophobic cultures in the Caribbean, Canada, and the U.S.; they describe attempts to maintain optimism within, and independence from, the constraints of ideological eras organized to suppress and homogenize.

The significance of poetry as the modus operandi to explore options for positive change and emancipation from hegemonic social paradigms is a theme that accretes critical mass through the course of the documentary. Rich observes of U.S. imperialism, "We are really looking at an all-embracing global system in which, as you say, capitalism itself has become the nation.... And there is no other nation to belong to, you know.... but then this makes me think of Derek Walcott's line, 'My only nation was the imagination.'" "But in the larger sense," Rich continues, "to *imagine* something different *is* the task" (*LS* 418). Poetry proves the crucible in which imagination is given form and in turn shapes a radical vision. Rich remarks:

> It really isn't that one just has this secret, illicit pleasure in making poetry or making, you know, art, and feels guilty about it. But I think if you have that

> pleasure, if you have that joy of creativity, and you've been allowed to have it in a society like, you know, yours or mine, you want it for everyone. You really want it … there [as] a possibility for anyone who might have that desire. (434)

As a tool for psychic liberation, poetry provides Rich with a mode of ongoing self-reflection, a method of social analysis, and a means of articulation. Poetry is clearly a self-actualizing process for Rich, the benefits of which must be made available to others who seek to direct the discourse of their own lives.

Brand engages poetry in ways akin to those of Rich. *Listening for Something* concludes with Brand's reading of a portion of "no language is neutral," a segment that is—if not optimistic—at least reflective of Brand's effort to sustain a prophetic vision, one that does not merely capitulate to what has gone before:

> …but I have tried to imagine a sea not
> bleeding, a girl's glance full as a verse, a woman
> growing old and never crying to a radio hissing of a
> black boy's murder. I have tried to keep my throat
> gurgling like a bird's.
> …………………………………………
> I have tried to write this thing calmly
> even as its lines burn to a close. I have come to know
> something simple. Each sentence realised or
> dreamed jumps like a pulse with history and takes a
> side. What I say in any language is told in faultless
> knowledge of skin…. (*NLN* 34)

Here verse conveys a vision of a society reformed, redeemed from hopelessness and its history of racial violence. In the same moment that she acknowledges the language of her poetry is steeped irrevocably in individual and social particularity, the poem asserts the broader historical implications with which that language is invested. As documentary, *Listening for Something* also exercises the dynamic nature of language that enables the articulation of individual experience, social analysis, and the desire for conditions that surpass mere survival. Although Rich and Brand explore the ragged, grim fissures of racism, political intolerance, colonialism, homophobia, and patriarchy, *Listening for Something* ultimately resonates with the affirmative resilience the poets demand of themselves.

Razing barriers: documents of narrative resistance

Overall, Brand's documentaries explore the self-empowerment and proactive engagement of women who oppose racist and sexist political and economic structures. As such, the films carry out Brand's more comprehensive agenda: to provide the means for the articulation of learning and of practical tactics that develop around and in resistance to racism and sexism. The aim to propagate the social and political agendas of Black women's empowerment, within and beyond particular Black communities, lies at the heart of Brand's documentary film making.

In many ways more immediately accessible than text, documentary film proves an excellent medium through which Brand can connect a potentially wide range of viewers with her subjects. For the project of disseminating information about the interests, history, activism, and rights-related objectives of Black women, documentary communicates the specificities of "*the* world" in a manner both dynamic and engrossing. Film's chief advantage over text is, transparently, its immediate visual nature: the capacity to communicate the lingua franca, phraseology, and tonal nuances of a given speaker in the same instant that emotions surface, inevitably, in the speaker's voice—anger, astonishment, dismay, incredulity, and the like. Of course, film is also an ideal vehicle for Brand to provide particular Black women with an otherwise elusive instrument of articulation.

Despite her predilection for text as a medium of communication, Brand discovered that her films facilitate exposure to images of Black Canadian women in a manner more far-reaching and persistent than even she anticipated. She comments:

> You know, I realize that the films work in a certain way … independently of me. Much more independently of me than the books. So that I'll meet someone in Winnipeg who says they've seen *Sisters in the Struggle*, or I'll meet someone in Saskatoon who says it. You know it? They've seen it in a classroom or they've seen it somewhere like that—mostly in classrooms. So I know … there's a kind of work that they're doing which maybe they're suited to do…. they work in a whole other way [than text]. They work in a *teaching* kind of way that isn't necessarily the way I think other work works. (Personal interview)

The apparently widespread use of Brand's documentaries in classroom settings is indicative of the genre's appeal and practical accessibility. As pieces that can be shown publicly, in small spaces, and over a brief period of time, the documentaries provide the opportunity and means to represent Black women's lives in a comparatively visceral medium—in a variety of institutional locations, such as schools and libraries, to which Brand's material might otherwise have limited access. As a result, they have demonstrated a seemingly unanticipated resilience.

The enduring appeal of these films has much to do with their efficacy as pieces that "work in a *teaching* kind of way." Chambers, writing of the methods by which oppositional representative modes produce subversive effects, suggests it is durability that renders particular works influential:

> [I]t is the ongoing *readability* of texts (and works of art), their ability to transcend the context of their production, that enables them to make all the necessary concessions and compromises with the prevailing power of the moment—to make use of the existing means of publication, for instance—but to do so, so to speak, as a tactic of "survival," so that their oppositional readability can become available, at a later date and in changed historical circumstances to a readership that is the true object of their "address." (2)

"Readership" can here be translated as *viewership*. Brand's documentaries, the product of oppositional tactics, found their fruition in a moment of ideological and institutional fracture, as Studio D sought to explore issues beyond the primary interests of the NFB. Chambers argues, "between the possibility of disturbance in the system and the system's power to recuperate that disturbance there is 'room for maneuver'" (xi). The task of the intellectual, in the moment, is to seize the opportunity to intervene in and exploit the State's not-seamless production of hegemonic ideology.

The positive response Brand has received from contemporary viewers testifies to the documentaries' continued relevance. It needs to be acknowledged, however, that Brand's interests lay also in directing films that would satisfy the need for psychological and psychic affirmation in audiences of the day. Speaking of *Older Stronger Wiser*'s premiere in Toronto, Brand enthusiastically recalls the details of the event:

> [T]here were *hundreds* of people, like *hundreds* of people from the Black community.... We had only planned like one screening for the film but had to put

> on another … so people had to fly around negotiating with the union in the theatre to put on a second screening…. It was *amazing*…. that that *hunger* I *knew* existed poured out…. You know we drove up in a cab and the line was around the theatre; it was like crazy. And it's not like this was a—this wasn't a fictional film or some blockbuster kind of high-action kind of film, right? This was a film of five portraits of five women. Stunning. (Personal interview)

The overwhelming draw this film "of five women" had upon Black viewers confirms the importance—the necessity—of this kind of representation of Blacks in Canada. *Older Stronger Wiser*, *Sisters in the Struggle*, *Long Time Comin'*, and *Listening for Something* begin to erode the barriers Canada's principal cultural and political institutions have erected against legitimate claims made by Blacks to meaningful inclusion within the nation's historical records and consciousness.

Gramsci maintains that "[c]ritical self-consciousness means, historically and politically, the creation of an *élite* of intellectuals" (*Prison* 334) able to deconstruct the ideological precepts and processes that sustain the entrenchment of hegemonic power. The work performed by Brand's four documentaries is the articulation and broadcasting of that critical consciousness as formulated by women active in feminist and/or Black Power movements, and those who choose deliberately to live according to feminist, egalitarian principles.

It is by way of oppositional tactics refined by intellectuals and practiced by a subaltern collective that hegemony is destabilized. Effective organization, Gramsci suggests, cannot evolve without the dissemination of an "*élite*['s]" vision among the subaltern class. The endeavour to disseminate theories and models of opposition among

Black women—in the form of "a biography of the ideas and strategies brought to bear on the struggle against them—racism and sexism" ("Film Proposal No. 2" 9)—is the project of Brand's four documentaries. Portable and enduring, they stand in as a form of surrogate organic intellectual, that is, filmic intermediaries between the theoretically astute and those who stand to benefit from theory's application.

While it is Brand's Women at the Well initiative that makes the wider dissemination of and accessibility to these potent but commonly elided voices a reality, it would be disingenuous and contrary to Gramsci's conception of the processes necessary to foster socio-political change to obscure the organic intellectualism of the women who appear in all four films. Above all, the Gramscian model of change is an inclusive and collaborative one that aims to develop consensus through the critical assessment and reformulation of common-sense knowledge, a process modeled by Toronto's BWC. To suggest that Brand is somehow primarily or exclusively responsible for the transmission of a particular set of worldviews would be to lionize an individual for what is an essentially collaborative struggle; moreover, it is a claim Brand would dismiss out of hand as misdirected. That said, it is the combination of collective and individual efforts, like Brand's, that effects change, a lesson made clear in *Older Stronger Wiser*.

Chapter 2

Speaking Racism: Disruption of Canadian National Narratives

> Nations reel and stagger on their way; they make hideous mistakes; they commit frightful wrongs; they do great and beautiful things. And shall we not best guide humanity by telling the truth about all this, so far as the truth is ascertainable?
>
> ~ W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Propaganda of History"

> The memory I am talking about is not the individual's own. It is instead the fruit of a collaboration among the inhabitants of a common social locale. Having said this much, I think I can avoid the troubling yet expressive term "collective memory," although I mean something like it. Or, rather, I mean to say that fundamental features of human memory are not grasped at the level of the isolated individual. Upbringing—or, to use my discipline's term, socialization—provides the context in which the human brain's, and mind's, imperfect capacity for memory develops. It is also a process by which human beings acquire things that cannot be remembered mistakenly.
>
> ~ Karen Fields, "What One Cannot Remember Mistakenly"

> People who encounter racism chart a voyage through isolation, recognition, awakening, organizing, and resistance. What emerges is "consciousness"—an understanding that your history is tied up with race, that your being is rooted in the history of your encounters in the world, and that you are constantly engaged in fighting racism.
>
> ~ Dionne Brand and Krisantha Sri Bhaggiyadatta, *Rivers Have Sources, Trees Have Roots: Speaking of Racism*

I have proposed that the manifest accomplishment of Dionne Brand's oeuvre is the generation of textual space for the voices of Black women and other people of colour, contributions that have thus far been excluded from Canadian historical records and consciousness. This space is perhaps nowhere evident so much as in two collaborative, non-fiction works rooted in the oral contributions of people of colour. *Rivers Have*

Sources, Trees Have Roots: Speaking of Racism, a book Brand co-authored with Krisantha Sri Bhaggiyadatta in 1986, is the first such piece. The compilation consists principally of brief excerpts culled from taped interviews with over one hundred women, men, and children of disparate races and varied ethnic and national origins. The book focuses on individual encounters with racism in formative social contexts such as education, employment, and other institutional settings. Brand's second work is narrower in scope, focusing exclusively on Black women's voices. *No Burden to Carry: Narratives of Black Working Women in Ontario 1920s to 1950s* comprises the lengthy narratives of just fifteen older women. Their herstories illuminate the broad fabric and common threads of experience that bind together their family lives, social networks, and their work within and outside the home.[1]

The effect of these two works upon the reader is determined in large part by the difference in the number and length of their respective entries. The many, many pithy anecdotes that make up *Rivers Have Sources* accrue a kind of critical mass, a crushing accumulation of incidents that overwhelm the reader's ability to dissociate from the cascade of racist confrontations the book records. By way of extended narrative accounts, *No Burden to Carry*, on the other hand, underscores the persistence and mixture of racial conflicts inflicted upon individuals over the course of their lifetimes. I will return to fill out the implications of these characteristics later in this chapter; for now, however, I will concentrate on the feature that unifies these two works: oral narrative.

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[1] The title of this volume of narratives is drawn from the contributions of a woman whose account is not included in *No Burden to Carry*. "In the 1930s her mother and father told her that education was 'no burden to carry,' and no one could take it away from her." Brand writes: "It struck me that with this advice they might have felt they were handing her a way out of both gender and race inequality" (34).

They must be oral histories/herstories

Brand and Sri Bhaggiyadatta's decision to utilize interviews as the means to elicit individuals' accounts of confrontations with racism is a pragmatic one, since a crucial effect of racism is the amplification of an individual's sense of isolation and exclusion. Due to the individualizing nature of the penalties that Canadian racism inflicts, the merit of collecting and sharing individual racist encounters is that the accounts, when combined, reveal the systemic and pervasive nature of this scourge. Levelled against the spew of hegemonic ideology, the voices of the subaltern hold greater potency as counter-narrative when they are recorded and amassed. Writing in the introduction of *Rivers Have Sources*, Brand and Sri Bhaggiyadatta contend that "[t]he value of an oral document" is that "it gives specificity to events and incidents; it places these events within the continuum of our daily lives." "We believe," the two continue, "that the telling of experiences is valid history and, in the case of our subject, particularly so as racism acts as a powerful tool to censor oppositional voices" (2). *Rivers Have Sources* engages discrete voices and fuses them, mobilizes them so they can speak truth to power.

Writing in *No Burden to Carry*'s introduction, Brand explains the rationale behind her decision to elicit the "precise social construction of Black women's lives, the ways in which we live every day, our place in the political, economic and social structures" (*NBC* 30). Here, too, Brand considers it necessary and prudent to engage oral herstory as her mode of inquiry and recovery:

> The dearth of information about and references to Black women's history led me to employ oral history as a method of inquiry. But this was not the only reason: the historical relationship between Black peoples in Canada and "mainstream"

> society has been one of subordination, which doubtlessly taints a historical record often written by, spoken about and interpreted by those who hold power within the relationship. An oral history, therefore, affords a primacy to the opinions and interpretations of the people so subjected. (*NBC* 31)

Brand maintains it is, "[o]f course, … also necessary to pose these hidden interpretations against what is told and recorded … that [to do so] is the second most important task of an oral history" (*NBC* 31). This declaration warrants closer scrutiny.

While the enumeration of confrontations with racism by those who experience them can be marshalled to offset hegemony's erasure of racism's presence in this country, so too must the herstorical circumstances of Black women's social, political, and economic conditions be communicated to counter the general absence of information that currently exists. Brand clarifies this need in "No Burden to Carry":

> Inquiry into the history of Blacks in Canada has, on the whole, assumed that it is possible to know all there is to know about the subject at a glance. If Black life in Canada as a whole has been absent from the works of Canadian scholars, or inadequately served by them, Black women's lives have been doubly hidden. Within existing accounts, Black peoples are taken as a genderless group. (*NBC* 12)

How, then, does one pose "these hidden interpretations"—anchored in common-sense justifications of Canada's subtle racism and gendered invisibility—against records that exist only imperfectly?

Brand and those with whom she collaborates with respond to this dilemma of inadequacy in three ways. First, I suggest, they work to identify omissions in Canadian historical, economic, and political scholarship germane to people of colour, and then strive to account for some portion of those elisions. Second, Brand and her coauthors exercise considerable inquisitiveness around, and knowledge about, these categories of omission in order to promote awareness of what stands to be gained from summoning public scrutiny to these issues through collaborative scholarly output, or by means of the amplification of others' expression via publication. Often, Brand's counterhegemonic reading of socio-economic conditions enables a critique of the assertions and interpretations of other scholars and thus redresses points of view habitually constricted either by the elision of gender as a category, or by fallacious thinking that forestalls adequate analysis and assessment of race as a social construct.[2] Third, Brand's collaborative works facilitate the public articulation of people of colour, specifically Black women, around their understanding of their social milieu, their lives, and their labour. These three steps ultimately enrich the Canadian socio-historical record.

Writing in "Black Women Intellectuals," bell hooks concludes the essay with the following assertion:

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[2] Examples of Brand's redress of interpretive and historical representation are found in *No Burden to Carry*. Here she critiques Winks's comments on the early Black church in Canada, when he suggests, "While these churches usually were fragments of Protestantism, they frequently cut themselves off from the larger body, and tended to be theologically stagnant" (*NBC* 17). Brand's alternative reading contextualizes the practices that Winks describes:

> Given the racial segregation of the period (well-documented by Winks himself), one wonders at Winks' conclusion that Black churches "cut themselves off." Doubtless the churches were conservative in their thinking as to a way forward for Blacks, but that seems more a feature of Christianity, and "cutting themselves off" seems more a tactic for survival and self-preservation than the failure that Winks suggests. (*NBC* 17–18)

Brand also notes Winks's neglect to mention the ordination of Rev. Addie Aylestock, in 1951, in the British Methodist Episcopal Church, the first woman to be ordained in Canada (*NBC* 18). See also "Addie Aylestock—1909" (64 and 72) in the same volume.

> Oftentimes intellectual work compels confrontation with harsh realities. It may remind us that domination and oppression continue to shape the lives of everyone, especially Black people and people of colour. Such work not only draws us closer to the suffering, it makes us suffer. Moving through this pain to work with ideas that may serve as a catalyst for the transformation of our consciousness, our lives, and that of others is an ecstatic and joyous process. When intellectual work emerges from a concern with radical social and political change, when that work is directed to the needs of the people, it brings us into greater solidarity and community. It is fundamentally life-enhancing. (164)

Although much of the subject matter of *Rivers Have Sources* and *No Burden to Carry* is often painful to read about, one cannot doubt the fulfilment of political commitments these works represent. As Brand comments, "I think that at the moral core, if you want, of my work, is *that* idea: the idea of a kind of human space which is empty of racism and race, which is empty of class oppression…. And I think I couldn't possibly, given the circumstances of my life, think anything else…. [F]or me it seemed a complete denial of so many things not to pursue this idea" (Personal interview). The considerable degree to which Brand's work enables a form of social and political exchange within communities of people of colour—contributors as well as readers—promotes the kind of frank assessment of material conditions that reveals tactics of survival and recuperation.

The collection and publication of anecdotes contained in *Rivers Have Sources*, joined with the substantial narratives of *No Burden to Carry*, affirms the right and responsibility of people of colour to speak from individual, personal knowledge; Brand and her coauthors make the public articulation and recording of these experiences, concerns, and this history possible. Brand organizes these voices so they communicate in a complimentary, collective manner and are thus able to launch, in a cumulative sense, a critique of the socio-political and -economic forces that effectively shape many aspects of the lives of people of colour: patterns of kinship, personal interactions with community organizations, educational opportunities and expectations, conditions and limitations that have an impact upon employment, and social aspirations and expectations. The publication of *No Burden to Carry* fulfils what Julia Swindells identifies as the purpose of "'Women's history,' as well as [of] publishing and republishing silenced texts," namely, to "begin to produce a critique of the history which has perpetuated that silence [that surrounds women's autobiography] and ignored 'personal' histories as inadequate evidence or the product of those who are 'not quite' historians" (Swindells 24).[3] By breaking the silence that has surrounded the lives of Black working women in Ontario from the 1920s to the 1950s, the publication of the *No Burden to Carry* narratives launches an implicit critique of the absence of these voices from mainstream historical accounts. For its part, *Rivers Have Sources* breaks the silence that allows hegemonic socio-political structures to downplay the prevalence of racism as an organizing principle in Canadian labour, education, and, consequently, ensuing class and cultural divisions.

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[3] Swindells, in her essay "Liberating the Subject? Autobiography and 'Women's History': A Reading of *The Diaries of Hannah Cullwick*," highlights the problematic nature of autobiography with respect to "the expression or articulation of the subject. In the loci of subject disciplines, it is not quite fantasy or Art (in English); neither is it quite evidence (in History). It is this 'not quite' status which can frequently be seen in autobiographers' self-justifications drawn from the conventions of naturalism in English and History: this is 'the true story,' this is the tale of 'a real life'" (25).

Putting subaltern stories out: alternative personal "history" and "herstory"

The socio-historical significance of the personal, subaltern-class narratives, with which most of Brand's non-fiction works engage, is subjected to a variety of delegitimations as an effect of dominant institutional prejudices. Not least of these is an ideological disinclination to endorse autobiography as an authenticating mode of historical articulation. This reluctance is especially enduring with respect to the narratives of women and men of colour. Of course, whether narratological or autobiographical in nature, the dependence of such accounts upon the (perhaps) indeterminable credibility of the subjective *I* can make melding oral history and autobiography with mainstream History problematic. More significant than the subjective nature of the narratological *I*, however, is the degree of influence that a subject exercises within dominant socio-economic structures (recognizing that such influence corresponds to the subject's relative alignment with a range of hegemonic markers such as race and sex). The auras of permanence, veracity, and normalcy that accrue to dominant ideologies endow constructed History with a seemingly a-temporal stability; hegemonically constructed History—as a staple of false consciousness—benefits from an apparent insusceptibility to subjective or transient individualized supplements.

Capital *H* History, or homogenized nation-narratives, is able to maintain a pretence of validity and authenticity only insofar as it does not require persistent verification at the level of the individual, where it is likely to come up short in most practical applications. On the other hand, individual accounts that do affirm dominant ideologies and nation-narratives—what Martineau has referred to as "extraordinary portrait[s]" (236)—appear to validate the viability of hegemonic social constructs.

Because dominant nation-narratives and ideology depend on the silencing of "the other" even as they maintain the pretence of even-handed treatment, subaltern discourse can be transformative when it intrudes upon ostensibly seamless constructs that appear ahistorical and commonsensical. In the writing of subaltern history, autobiography and oral histories are commonly the tools that fray the fabric of nation-narrative.

The construction and accrual of an opaque authority, the hegemonic aura that looms round nation-narrative, is produced and sustained by means of Foucauldian institutional repetitions, opportunistic adjustments, and the endorsement and mobilization of complementary ideologies by hegemonic social institutions. The (re)productive impact of this process upon writing History, Swindells contends, is the perpetuation of "an unexamined place of authority and privilege for the historian who thinks himself real, as well as a good deal of confusion about the subjects and objects of history" (27). Swindells asserts that it is not strictly the redemption of autobiography that provokes her interest in the genre; hers is a desire, akin to Brand's, to identify voices contrary to otherwise opaque and insufficiently contested authority, a desire to bolster the legitimacy and projection of oppositional voices. Swindells reasons thus:

> [I]n perceiving the position in which autobiography is placed—its [low] status as text—there is no way of avoiding seeing how other texts are placed and how that places subjects. The low or unplaced status of autobiography in History, which for so long has reflected [negatively] on the autobiographer, should now begin to reflect rather on the "real historian" and the ways in which liberal humanism and even male socialism arrange their objects and subjects. To see where

> autobiography is placed is to begin to see, indeed, who speaks for History. (27–28)

This formulation suggests that autobiography—particularly the oral history of subaltern classes, who remain peripheral to hegemonic Historical and socio-cultural production—struggles against prejudices that are, in fact, inflamed by autobiography's claim to establish and validate authentic, agential subjectivity.

Swindells contends that "in men's histories, autobiography has been taken to be a text of low status, hardly deemed appropriate to the history of 'real historians' and unable to tell us very much at all" (24). Negation of the value of individualized disclosure leaves little space for the bona fide contributions to be made by Black women and others deemed socially peripheral to the formation of Canada's nation-narratives. Swindells elaborates why the subjective *I* of autobiography draws the fire of mainstream historians, which is aimed to delegitimate individual perspectives and contributions:

> Autobiography, because of its emphatic "I," which is a transparency, a vulnerability, becomes the historian's scapegoat for problems with "material" and with other historians. Instead of History being the issue—the relationship between the personal and the social being a problem of all texts, all material, of History—*autobiography becomes the issue*, leaving our real historian free to patronize autobiographers, and perhaps more seriously, to maintain an unquestioned hierarchy of texts, of evidence, operating in the names of the *lowly personal* and the *superior social*. (emphasis added, 27)

For Brand, however, and indeed for the reader of *Rivers Have Sources* and *No Burden to Carry*, the potency of the "lowly personal" derives from not only the "emphatic 'I,'" differentiated from mainstream Historical record-makers, but from the aggregate experience of people of colour the works articulate.

Collecting voices to denaturalize dominant discourses

I have thus far written of Brand and Sri Bhaggiyadatta's work as fusing discrete voices so they might speak truth to power, of voices communicating in a complimentary and collective manner, and, just now, of the aggregate experience of people of colour that the two authors' work articulates. It is instructive, perhaps, to consider why such a collective utterance against hegemonic normalcy and homogenizing structures is beneficial. This task can be productively nuanced by Benedict Anderson's declaration that "[t]he dreams of racism actually have their origin in ideologies of *class*, rather than those of nation" (149). "[O]n the whole," Anderson affirms, "racism and anti-semitism [sic] manifest themselves, not across national boundaries, but within them. In other words, they justify not so much foreign wars as domestic repression and domination" (149–50). In light of the fact that the population in a capitalist economy consists disproportionately of subaltern and the auxiliary classes, it stands to reason that, as a numerical majority, the masses would seek to express their needs in a collective manner. The imbalance in material wealth and political influence that differentiates the subaltern and auxiliary classes from the bourgeoisie and upper—or fundamental—classes necessitates the fused political declarations and collective action of the socio-economically disenfranchised. To the degree that political change in a democracy is a consequence of numerical primacy, it is imperative to cultivate and coordinate collective expressions of public will.

Writing of the normalized and normalizing conceptions of nationhood, Anderson remarks, "in everything 'natural' there is always something unchosen. In this way, nation-ness is assimilated to skin-colour, gender, parentage and birth-era—all those things one can not help. And in these 'natural' ties … because these ties are not chosen, they have about them a halo of disinterestedness" (143). This seeming neutrality inevitably has negative consequences for immigrants who as a result of birthplace do not square with naturalized narratives of belonging. This holds true, also, for those who stand outside the bounds of favoured race, gender, and class categories. Faced with essentializing, regulatory nation-narratives, collective voices must mobilize to reveal vested interests in what seemingly and dispassionately constitutes the "natural"—to deconstruct apparent "disinterestedness" so as to unveil discourses fabricated purposely to legitimate the status quo. At the heart of both these projects lies the responsibility to disclose disingenuous and self-interested ideologies, the intellectual framework of the hegemonic classes that either favours or disparages "all those things one can not help." To do this is to destabilize the hierarchies that restrict how Canada's community can be imagined.

Rinaldo Walcott, in "'Who is she and what is she to you?': Mary Ann Shadd Cary and the (Im)possibility of Black/Canadian Studies," advances a fairly persuasive reading of the elision of Blacks, women especially, from Canada's imagined communities and nation-narrative. He posits that Canadian Studies tends to function as a gatekeeper for, and administrator of, national narratives that effectively homogenize the popular imagination of past and present Canada as a principally white, male space. Walcott argues that the induction of Blackness into those narratives stands to destabilize—by means of addition and division—the cohesive myths that bind imaginations to a popular vision of Canada that reflects but little of its actual complexity or disparity.

Though he writes with special focus on the pedagogically revolutionary potential of Mary Ann Shadd Cary, a figure who has lately galvanized the attention of scholars and historians interested in Black and feminist studies, Walcott's more catholic observations indirectly but positively refigure the disruptive potential of Brand's wide-ranging perspective on Canadian historiography and feminist research. He writes:

> It is my contention that when Blackness works to elaborate Canadianness it simultaneously unsettles Canadianness. That is, Blackness interrupts "Canadian" scenes and simultaneously sets the stage for particular and different enactments of Canadianness. These different enactments of Canadianness are instances of what Homi Bhabha calls "narrating the nation." Blackness is a counter-narration of the normalized image of Canadian as chromatically white. To consider Shadd Cary in Canadian Studies means that official narrations of the nation must be revised and restaged because Canadian Studies as a configuration is implicated in reproducing particular narratives of the nation—narratives that are often normative notions of the nation as phenotypically white. These narratives simultaneously address Blackness and repress it. Canadian Studies, then, is deeply implicated in many of the "technologies of otherness" that in turn produce Blackness as a recent phenomena [sic] in the nation. Of course we now know that the recentness of Blackness is a false construct. (37–38)

Walcott's observations raise the spectres that haunt dominant nation-narratives, issues Brand takes up in *Rivers Have Sources* and her other work. These issues include the persistent exclusion of information about Black presence and history in Canada from secondary-school and higher-education curricula, the normalization of the perception of Canada as a white Euro-based nation, and the construct of Black presence in Canada as contemporary and essentially disruptive.

In this vein, Walcott goes on to suggest that "to consider gender within the contexts of national formation is to unsettle the nation: when gender is raced, the disruption is massive. When it is a Black woman we must consider, national formation is thrown into chaos" (38). Although sympathetic to Walcott's reading of reigning Canadian narratives as monolithic, myopic, and largely monochromatic, I confess I find his speculation compelling only at the conceptual level, due mainly to the fact that the notion of racial homogeneity maintains a formative hold on prevailing nation-narratives. Nonetheless, Walcott is quite justified in his promotion of a more encompassing reading of Canada's historical contributors and makeup. Homi Bhabha, in his essay "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation," quotes Ernest Gellner, who observes: "Nationalism is not what it seems, and above all not what it seems to itself… The cultural shreds and patches used by nationalism are often arbitrary historical inventions. Any old shred would have served as well. But in no way does it follow that the principle of nationalism … is itself in the least contingent and accidental" (294). Walcott argues here for a conscientious historicism that is, indeed, neither contingent nor accidental. However, he compels the assembly of an historical patchwork for which the selection of "shreds" can in no way be arbitrary, but must be organized purposely to induce a disruptive reading of nation as unitary in a homogeneous sense.

My reading of Brand's larger project is that she contributes, in an active and ongoing way, to the disruptive, unorthodox reading and construction of Canada's various nation-narratives. Her work frequently results in the kind of substantive material necessary to fulfil Walcott's call for the inclusion of examples of otherness that have shaped the nation. Consequently, I find Brand's pragmatic work more compelling than Walcott's theoretical formulations. Unfortunately, I find it difficult to sustain Walcott's rather optimistic assessment of the disruptive capacity of the introduction of Black women into the normative equation of Canada's makeup, with the effect that "national formation is thrown into chaos." Would that it were so! Thus far, however, the nearly endlessly absorptive capacity of the Canadian national imaginary has defied claims by Black women, and people of colour in general, to equal citizenship and political and economic empowerment.

Speaking racism: disruption of a Canadian national narrative

Published in 1986, *Rivers Have Sources, Trees Have Roots: Speaking of Racism* provides a quite structured look at the elements of racism that people of colour (in the Toronto area particularly) experienced over a period of economic recession beginning in the 1970s. Interviews conducted by Sri Bhaggiyadatta and Brand catalogue the impacts of racist discrimination within formative communities such as the family, institutions, and work settings. Arguing that "[t]he histories of the groups … interviewed are a crucial measure of racism in this country" (4), the authors sound out First Nations, Black, South Asian, Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino populations, among others.

Two themes rise to the surface of *Rivers Have Sources*: the first of these is the persistence of what Sri Bhaggiyadatta and Brand dub "a culture of racism" (3), the second is that of racism as an organizing principle responsible for "the structuring of hardship or disadvantage" (4) for people of colour in this country. A culture of racism is one that is organized through and sanctioned by hegemonic structures, or what Louis Althusser has called Repressive State Apparatus (RSAs): "the Government, the Administration, the Police, the Courts, the Prisons, etc." (142–43).[4] Canada's particular style of racism, however, is enabled in large part by the soft effects of immigration legislation, as it determines immigration quotas and criteria, and by ineffectual government intervention that does little to engender employment opportunities or security, human or civil rights. In either case, racism must be traced back "from the individual encounter to the political practice[s]" (192) that legitimate it as an instrument of control. As one woman queries in *Rivers Have Sources*, "There's always the inclination on the part of the government to try to refer to racism as a personal matter. Somebody on the street calls you a name—who allows them?" (72). While the regulation of "personal" expression as a means to silence racist utterance is untenable and undesirable, it is of course also true that dominant ideologies find their voices in the mouths of the subjects they form. If the acknowledgment of racism by and within the public sphere is generally taboo in Canada, certainly the practical consequences of racism are not.

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[4] Althusser explains his use of the term "repressive" in the following way: "Repressive suggests that the State Apparatus in question 'functions by violence'—at least ultimately (since repression, e.g. administrative repression, may take non-physical forms)" (143).

For people of colour, the negative effects of Canada's culture of racism are, in fact, augmented by social myths that seek to shroud the tension, anger, and oppositional impulses racism sets off. One of the prime ideological constructs that suppress awareness of active racism in Canada is a belief that individual encounters with racism are just that: individual. "This individualization of racism to *certain* policemen, or *certain* social service officials, or *certain* teachers diverts attention from meaningful changes in the operations of the respective institutions," write Brand and Sri Bhaggiyadatta (emphasis added, 4). Several social instruments contribute to this suppression, including a mass media that often neglects to report on oppositional movements or popular protest, while at the same time it circulates, frequently with misrepresentation and harmful inaccuracy, accounts of alleged abuses committed by minority populations.

One such incident was a report entitled "Campus Give Away" produced by the investigative television programme *W5*. In its story, *W5* "claimed that a lot of good white boys [couldn't] go to school because the Chinese have taken up the seats." One contributor to *Rivers Have Sources* clarifies the reality and the actions taken to correct W5's shameful broadcast: "They claim we are foreigners! The Chinese, most of them—the university students—are all Canadians. None of them are foreigners. We wanted *W5* to apologize, to correct their statement, but they wouldn't do it. Finally we got organized in sixteen cities. We had a big meeting down here and finally they apologized" (30). Had *W5*'s reporters made the appropriate effort to actually speak with the students they photographed, the programme misrepresentation could have been avoided. To do so, however, would have interfered with the propagation of a racist myth that served the interests of the media (by producing a controversial segment). The myth would have persisted had not a tremendous amount of energy and organization gone into calling *W5* to account. The patent disparity between the effort required by *W5* to propagate this myth of displacement (via television), and the much more laborious, more complex effort required to correct its misinformation, is indicative of the facility with which racist myths can be sown in fertile soil and the difficulty of rooting them out.

Federal and provincial ministries and bureaucracies also serve to sandbag individual and collective efforts to redress discriminatory practices. Their effective muffling of dissent contributes at several levels to the "subtlety or invisibility [that] is a major feature of racism in Canada.... It is, in fact, this subtlety that places the burden of proof of racism on the injured individual or group, and serves to discourage complaints and actions against racism" (4). In this regard, *Rivers Have Sources* works to disrupt the common perception of racism as merely incidental and sporadic.

Rivers Have Sources has the potential to disturb the maintenance of mainstream, ostensibly "common sense" beliefs about race. In the book's forward, the authors point out that "[i]n its style and content," *Rivers Have Sources*, because it provides a number of people of colour (albeit a small number) the opportunity to speak as experts on racism in their own lives, it "stands by itself among the range of anti-racist literature in Canada" (i). The scope and the consistency of grievances the book catalogues belie assertions that individuals are to blame for racist confrontations rather than those social structures that reflect state interests.

The contributors who add to the book remain anonymous, although race and sex are often discernible. Though it is arguable that the inclusion of personal names could serve in a positive way to individualize and thereby concretize the depersonalizing practices of racism, the effect of the anonymous entries is actually one of multiplication and profusion: the anecdote of one speaker becomes the potential account of many such nameless individuals in Canada, so that individual voices achieve a kind of fusion through their shared narratives. The personal account becomes a public one; the private conflict realizes, and feeds, collectivity. In this way, common and widespread experiences, albeit variously nuanced and individually confronted, achieve a kind of cultural critical mass that explodes the myth of racist skirmishes as transpiring only intermittently.

Brand avers that, "in fact, the *act* of race and racism is to sweep away very quickly whole masses of people with *one* kind of ideology"; consequently, she says, "I feel like my work is to piece back together small bit by small bit the actual makeup of this human thing" (Personal interview). One imposition of a culture of racism is a kind of faceless homogeny by means of which a person of colour comes, metonymically, to signify his or her race. The consequence, as one contributor comments, is that as "an individual you have to be tighter. That's what was instilled in me. You always make sure you're dressed properly, you remember your thank-you's even if they don't. You're never relaxed, because you're not too sure what they're thinking about you. You're carrying the burden for every Black person in the world" (*RHS* 14). Another person acknowledges: "Racism is very stressful. When I do something I feel that my peers, or somebody behind me, is going to be judged by what I've done. If I happen to make a mistake of some kind, somebody is going to get it. You're supposed to be an ambassador for the entire race. You feel like you have to go out and you have to prove yourself to everybody" (66). The systemic pressure applied to individuals in a racial group to *not* distinguish themselves also exerts stress *within* that population to suppress personal differences. One woman comments on this burdensome and suppressive obligation this way:

> The thing about racism is that the communities that suffer racism have to appear normal and cohesive. It is conformity. Racism stops you from having a whole range of opinions and ideas in your own community. People figure we have enough problems, don't give us another to deal with. So there is sexism in the community and it is unabated. I have to stand the sexism because we are supposed to be a cohesive community. (155)

The bitter supplement of a culture of racism, then, is imposed complicity with the mechanisms of oppression: it smothers individuation in the larger social world at the same time that differences within marginal populations are curbed. *Rivers Have Sources* rejects these restrictions on both levels: it catalogues a wide range of racist confrontations experienced by individuals, and while it acknowledges the common liabilities of racism, the voices of Blacks, Natives, and East Indians identify concerns specific to their constituencies. Additionally, the contributions of both women and men represent concerns with, and patterns of, abuses specific to gender.

It is not Brand and Sri Bhaggiyadatta's objective with this collection to portray a set of uniform experiences that transgress all boundaries of race, sex, class, or geography; nor is it their aim to produce a unified, rigorously coherent statement about the implications of racism and sexism for those forced to confront it. Rather, despite the inevitability of difference—whether difference lies in the forms altercations take, the responses conflicts engender, or the consequences of racism or sexism for a population as a whole—what remains central is the identification of overall patterns of oppression that can be challenged most successfully—maybe only—through collective efforts. While the notion of collectivity is often circumscribed by those who exercise the most control within a given population, as they impose definitions of membership that subordinate individual or group differences to a supposed collective good, Brand and Sri Bhaggiyadatta appear to suggest that only when the totality of hegemonic oppressions is acknowledged, and simultaneously understood as detrimental to the population as a whole, can community be realized in a truly catholic sense.

Sri Bhaggiyadatta and Brand contend, "the structuring of hardship or disadvantage" (4) for people of colour is a significant feature of racism in Canada, and the substance of *Rivers Have Sources* shores up their claim. The organization of barriers to equity takes many forms at different levels of state administration. At the local level, these barriers comprise low academic expectations for students of colour and streaming into trade schools, away from university programmes; in higher education, course syllabi and curricula omit study relevant to race.[5] After participation in a "Smash The Klan"

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[5] Beginning in the 1970s, the Black Students' Union (BSU), in Ontario, maintained a chapter on each University of Toronto campus, as well as at York University, Ryerson Polytechnic, and many community colleges. It played a vital role in opening up opportunities in education—cultural and academic—to Ontario's Black students:

> For example, the Transitional Year Program at the University of Toronto was begun because of the agitation of the Black Students' Union for a better shake for Black people who wanted to go back to school but did not have the means or who had had to drop out of high school. The Black Education Project (BEP) also came out of the BSU. For ten years this project was a key community information and advocacy organization. A large part of their focus was to intervene in the public school system on behalf of Black children and parents over the issues of streaming. The BEP also held classes for Black kids, held Black family days, cultural classes, and was for a decade the general service organization for the

protest, one interviewee singles out the comparatively quiet but insidious effects of racism in government institutions as more nefarious and difficult to combat, ultimately, than even the Ku Klux Klan: "I think one of the biggest problems we had was that we framed racism as that special kind of violence rather than emphasizing its everyday nature. The Ku Klux Klan is not as much a problem here as the police are, or Employment and Immigration, or the Board of Education. That's where the real racism is" (174). Highlighting the positive results of collective effort, *Rivers Have Sources* attends to a number of the successes achieved as a result of parents' activism around issues of education. Parents "have made this effort," write Brand and Sri Bhaggiyadatta, "because they recognize it as one of the most important places where the culture of the society is perpetuated" (83). "For non-whites," they affirm, "the fight for fair education became the fight for anti-racist education" (85). The efforts of parents in Toronto saw the board of education bring in the Heritage Language Program in 1977,[6] which enabled students whose first language was not English to receive some instruction in their native tongue. As a "strategy to fight the endemic racism of the educational system" (85), the Black Heritage Program (BHP) was launched to emphasize the specificities of Black culture, as well as to deter the streaming of Black students into vocational schools.

Black community. It was staffed voluntarily for most of its life, at one time refusing to take grants from the government. (*RHS* 176)

[6] In 1977, the mandate of the Ontario Government enabled school boards to make available instruction of non-official languages in those schools where at least 25 students were enrolled. The Heritage Language Program, as it was called, was viewed as a means to sustain and transmit cultural identities, languages, customs, and traditions to succeeding generations. In order to identify the program more closely with the educational, social, and economic values of language study, the Heritage Language Program was renamed the International Languages Program (ILP) in 1993.

Oftentimes, activist efforts to relax or at least balance immigration strictures, or to address racist inequities in employment settings, meet with an ironic but not surprising flourish of federal and provincial bureaucracy. On the subject of the need to reduce police violence and to reduce injurious reportage on marginalized populations by the media, one contributor offers a cagey assessment:

> I think the main reason the attacks stopped or lessened … was because the authorities and media were determined to stop them. They felt the attacks were becoming counterproductive…. There is a limit the authorities can accept without hurting their own interests….
>
> The system is not a conspiracy. It's not that some people plan all this. They partly plan the objectives, the rest is a reaction to the whole issue. There's a difference between *managing* racism and *eliminating* racism. (emphasis added, 86–87)

Rivers Have Sources reveals that part and parcel of the management of racism is its bureaucratization. At the provincial level in Ontario, the implementation of human rights legislation produced a Byzantine labyrinth of channels and boards to stem the flow of anger caused by unjustified job firings and ill treatment at the hands of provincial departments. A civil rights lawyer explains:

> People are completely confused [about] where to go: there may be a dozen government agencies dealing with racism. With police racism, for example, you've got the Public Complaints Bureau, the Ontario Police Commission, and the Public Complaints Commissioner. You've also got the Ombudsman, because

> the OHRC [Ontario Human Rights Commission] does not deal with racism in government departments. (47)

To make matters worse, at the time of the publication of *Rivers Have Sources*, the OHRC lacked adequate funding, had no full-time legal counsel, and was without an official venue in which to hear cases. The OHRC was formulated to be neither efficient nor effective. These deficiencies were not without their purpose, as the civil rights lawyer argues: "They have now developed a way of containing people's rage. Rage, if it is immediate and uncontrolled, is very dangerous. So these agencies are able, in the same fashion as Royal Commissions, to stretch things out. I have not met anyone who dealt with the OHRC who was happy about the way their case was handled" (47). The frustrations produced, and the energy required to achieve consistently dismal results through the offices of OHRC, do little to moderate the hardship and insecurity of those who require the benefits of assistance joined to integrity.

The mechanism designed to contain racial disaffection on the national plane is given form in Canada's policy of multiculturalism; it appears to move race relations forward while it actually sidesteps the most critical issues. Multicultural policy, launched in October 1971, neither addresses the roots of racism explicitly nor even identifies it as a problem. Instead, as Sri Bhaggiyadatta and Brand indicate, "the policy [implies] that 'promoting creative encounters and interchange' … would assist in erasing racism and, still further, that 'cultural barriers' rather than racism had to be overcome. So ethnicity and cultural difference were considered the problem, rather than the use of those differences to deal out differential treatment" (19). In *Rivers Have Sources*, the authors develop a critique of those discriminatory policies that circumvent acknowledgement of, and evade dealing directly with, the economic and social structures that have negative impacts upon job security and advancement, educational opportunities, and economic parity. Ultimately, they forestall a sense of social citizenship.

The accounts of the many individuals interviewed for *Rivers Have Sources* serve to debunk the fallacies of racial inferiority that promote the exploitation and exclusion of people colour, fallacies sustained at the level of the national imaginary. Community organization around misrepresentation in the media, the formation of unions to combat abuse and victimization at the hands of employers, and activism aimed to address deficiencies in a school system that denies children of colour the potential for success: these are three areas in which marginalized populations experienced the power of collaboration to alter their circumstances, whether or not their successes were ultimately sustainable. In these endeavours, the generation that fashioned alliances and acted out in order to change their conditions distinguished itself from an earlier generation that sought assimilation and a comparatively self-contained existence.

Personal narratives and intellectual engagement

The considerable emotional appeal and cognitive persuasiveness of an individual's narrative account is powerfully linked to the immediacy of such a recounting. What else is as compelling as an individual's understanding of her own experience as she comes up against—and surpasses or bends to—the external barriers she has met with as the consequences of racism, sexism, misogyny, and mundane economic hardship? What is more directly symbolic of an individual's encounter with the context of her life than the experiences that have shaped and changed her, the accommodations and transformations she has been required to make? It is quotidian struggles and the framework of practical contradictions in which they occur that autobiographers describe and explore. And it is out of this struggle and engagement with the materiality of daily existence, according to Gramsci, that the innate intellectual capacity of individuals develops. In Gramsci's view, "in any physical work, even the most degraded and mechanical, there exists a minimum of technical qualification, that is, a minimum of creative intellectual activity" (*Prison* 8) is required by all people in order to function in particular material circumstances and specific social relations; it is this aptitude that makes positive social change, in the broadest sense, possible.

With respect to the longstanding discussion of the function intellectuals have to play in social transformation, Salamini observes that prior to Gramsci, Marxist analysis had centred on "the nature of their work and the nature of their ideas" (103) as defining characteristics. By way of contrast, Gramsci, to determine the functional quiddity of intellectuals, points to the service individuals render within a given social structure. He writes: "The most widespread error of method seems to me that of having looked for this criterion of distinction in the intrinsic nature of intellectual activities, rather than in the ensemble of the system of relations in which these activities (and therefore the intellectual groups who personify them) have their place within the general complex of social relations" (*Prison* 8). The emphasis Gramsci fixes on "systems of relations," and his overarching concern with the dialectical relationship of the social and the historical, locates the individual at the crossroads of the relations of production and ideological superstructure. Ideally, and practically, the cognitive ability to make sense of how these two components interconnect, and to discern one's position within systems of production, makes possible the development of a philosophy of praxis that can articulate those social relations and identify the means to alter them.

Gramsci de-emphasizes the nature of the work an individual performs, and thus it matters not whether an individual is an intellectual or labourer; instead, Gramsci chooses to focus on the mindfulness one has of his or her role as a mediator of, and a functionary within, a network of material and social relations. The keen awareness of the narrators of *No Burden to Carry* about their own material conditions, and their actions to alter and better the circumstances of other Blacks, suggests that, like Brand, many are organic intellectuals in their own right.

There is no reason to doubt that the women whose narratives comprise *No Burden to Carry* fully recognized the structures of racism that determined their location within the relations of production—that is, the hierarchically organized social and economic systems within which they functioned at the lowest levels. Nor can one question their cognizance of the austere, circumscribed employment opportunities open to them in Ontario's cities—options restricted as a direct consequence of gender. Analysis of the socially and historically structured sexual division of labour is central to distinguishing specificities of the lived experiences of Black women from those of Black men; the distinction is essential to differentiate the particular experiences of Black women when, in historical accounts, "'the race' is conflated into and narrowed to its male members" (*NBC* 12). For example, the fact that in years prior to 1940 "at least 80 percent of Black women in Canadian cities worked in domestic service" was a condition of female labour to which Black men were not subjected (*NBC* 15).[7] That Canada's immigration policies after the Second World War aimed to "recruit [Caribbean] women specifically as domestics" (Carty 194) had obvious, restrictive implications for the economic potential of such women, a predicament that existed independently of employment practices that structured labour for Black males.

Little pressure could be leveraged in the realm of Black women's labour to alter the entrenched relations of production that enforced ghettoized forms of work. The same lack of leverage did not obtain in the male labour market—at least not to the same degree. Although domestic work was for Black women what railroad work was for Black men, the establishment of, and the gains made by, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters union, established in 1918 and active through 1948, was a significant development not reproducible in the culture of women's domestic labour given its inherent lack of status and paltry economic returns.[8] Consequently, domestic work was the economic mainstay for Black women who were forced to hold fast to the existing labour structure to achieve some measure of financial security.

No Burden to Carry: shifting herstorical content

In keeping with the particularist nature and concentration of most of Brand's non-fiction material, the specificity of which makes possible the social authority of her work, it is important to note the delimited range of *No Burden to Carry: Narratives of Black Working Women in Ontario 1920s to 1950s*. In its portrayal of Black women, Brand stakes no claim for the universal, representative capacity of the collection. Acknowledging "we would not know about this past" that Black women have experienced had they "not told us" (*NBC* 34), Brand explains that the collection's subtitle "is given because these narratives do not hope to, or claim to, cover the whole life of the women who tell them, hence they are narratives of a certain time, narratives of particular moments in history" (34). The profound and crucial value of this work, then, for Brand, lies in its potential to "influence the approach of feminist research" (32), as well as its capture of the herstorical and social records of its protagonists.

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[7] Brand takes this information from James St. G. Walker's *A History of Blacks in Canada: A Study Guide* (Ottawa, Ministry of State-Multiculturalism, 1981), 132. By 1941, this division was still dominant in Montreal and, "By all accounts," Brand adds, "this was also the case in Toronto, Windsor and London" (*NBC* 22).

[8] For an overview of the development of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, see Robin W. Winks's *The Blacks in Canada: A History* 2nd ed. (Montreal, McGill-Queen's Press, 1997), 424–26.

Precisely how Brand aims to "influence the *approach* of feminist research" (emphasis added), however, remains somewhat ill defined. Unless by *approach* Brand means to alter the processes by which economic, historical, and cultural information is gathered (an improbable objective in light of continuing emphasis in the field to articulate and examine through direct interaction the narratives and lived circumstances of women), then the impulse to *influence* appears directed more at altering the content of women's studies, "what is told and recorded" (*NBC* 31). *No Burden to Carry*, and its derivative essay, "'We weren't allowed to go into factory work until Hitler started the war': The 1920s to the 1940s," join in concert with the collection of essays that comprise *"We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up": Essays in African Canadian Women's History* (1994). Together, they represent social and historicist interventions calculated to influence feminist research by shifting additional focus in Canada to the study of Black women, and thus contribute a necessary amendment to an incomplete record.[9]

In *"We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up,"* the volume's collaborators identify several areas in which mainstream accounts of Canadian and African Canadian history, conjoined with feminist perspectives of that history, have either elided the presence of Black women altogether or have failed to catalogue the conditions that have made singular their experiences in this country. The authors observe that although a variety of broad historical accounts of Blacks in Canada germinated in the 1970s and 1980s, they are marred by the absence of "any exploration of gender as a fundamental category of analysis" (Bristow et al 6);[10] moreover, when women do appear, they "are rarely seen as historical actors in their own right" (7). Subsequently, the fulfillment of two objectives are cited as the impetus behind the publication of this collection centred on African Canadian women: the first is to illuminate the experiences of women as substantially different from those of men, and to make clear that "[w]hile we [i.e., Black women] are subjected to racism as are Black men, gender compounds this situation" (4).

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[9] The title of *"We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up"* is culled from a speech given by Harriet Tubman that condemned efforts to have Blacks return to Africa in the nineteenth century: "She had likened Blacks to a field of onions or garlic that cannot be easily uprooted. Whites had brought Black people here to do their drudgery, and now were trying to root them out and ship them back to Africa. 'But,' she said, 'they can't do it; we're rooted here and they can't pull us up.' Her speech was very well received" (*WRH* 9).

[10] These histories include Robin Winks's *The Blacks in Canada: A History* (1971. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 1997); James W. St. G. Walker's *The Black Loyalists: The Search for a Promised Land in Nova Scotia and Sierra Leone 1783–1870* (London, ON: Longman and Dalhousie UP, 1976), and *A History of Blacks in Canada* (Quebec: Government Publications, 1980); and Daniel G. Hill's *The Freedom-Seekers: Blacks in Early Canada* (Agincourt, ON: Book Society of Canada, 1980).

Black women's calls for representation distinct from that of Black men is not restricted to contemporary historical accounts. Nelly Y. McKay, writing in "Nineteenth-Century Black Women's Spiritual Autobiographies: Religious Faith and Self-Empowerment," poses the following argument:

> While the major concern for all black people in America has always been race, the narratives of black women present a more complicated dilemma than those of their male counterparts. In the search for self, issues of gender are equally as [sic] important as those of race for the black female, a matter black men usually overlooked. Consequently, as male slave and spiritual narrators sought autonomy in a world dominated by racist white male views, black women writers demonstrated that sexism, inside and outside of the black community, was an equal threat to their quest for a positive identity. Black women use the personal narrative to document their differences in self-perception as well as their concerns for themselves and others, their sense of themselves as part of a distinct women's and racial community, and the complexities of the combined forces of race and gender for the only group beleaguered by both. (141–42)

The longevity of the struggle for an autonomous channel of representation for Black women's concerns, as outlined here by McKay, is somewhat startling. The persistence of the phenomenon sheds light on the sense of urgency and timeliness that infuse Brand's appeals for the articulation of unadulterated herstories when she writes about the significance of her films and *No Burden to Carry*.

The second objective of this publication, emphasized by the authors, is the need for and the desire to write a feminist history in order to offset the longstanding claim staked on the chronicle of History made by male historians who have dealt with masculine representations but have done little to position women in those accounts. Peggy Bristow, Linda Carty, Afua P. Cooper, Sylvia Hamilton, Adrienne Shadd, and Brand, the collaborators on *"We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up,"* acknowledge, "[t]he inclusion of women is … a [positive] product of contemporary feminism"; nevertheless, elisions yet obtain in feminist scholarship and historiography: "White feminist scholars have taken pains to locate women in the restructuring of Canadian history. However, as with white male history, race is neglected" (4). The collection and publication of oral herstories in Brand's *No Burden to Carry*, therefore, does not "influence the approach of feminist research" through the introduction of novel research techniques; rather, the work of the collection's compilers, Lois De Shield, Patricia Hayes, Carol Allain, Ayanna Black, and, again, Carty and Brand, significantly augments the body of Canadian feminist scholarship by means of identifying and correcting omissions in the area of Black women's herstory.[11] Clearly, how feminist research is done is shaped by who directs it and by the frontiers of their vision—the desire to claim space for Black women's herstory and its place within Canada's social record.

No Burden to Carry comprises the edited transcripts of interviews conducted with fifteen women born between 1900 and 1924, most of whom were alive and remained active at the time of the collection's publication in 1991. The narratives are remarkable for what they are: the first substantive published oral herstorical accounts by and about Black women in Canada since Blacks first landed here in 1605.[12] As the collection's subtitle indicates, Brand's first interest is to "examine work outside the home as a central theme in Black women's lives" (*NBC* 32). Accordingly, the interviews examine the following subjects: women's work in the external workplace, as well as in and around the home; the nature of working conditions and the kinds of work available to Black women prior to, during, and after the Second World War; and the implications that this indispensable labour had for families' financial survival. Because, as Black women, little had ever been recorded of their day-to-day lives, inquiries—in addition to those about "known" socio-historical events, such as the Second World War—aimed to gather information about aspects of life for which no records yet existed: "'What were your wages?' 'Where did you/Black people live?' 'How did you have children and work?' 'What was the "community" like?' 'Was there discrimination?' 'How did you deal with this or that situation?' 'Where did you socialise?' 'What kind of music did you dance to?' [and] 'Did you work outside the home and what did you work at?'" (32–33). Brand notes, too, that she "would also ask the women to go through a day or a week of their life. What did they think of women's liberation and, lastly, all the interviewers would always ask if these women had any advice for younger women" (33). This might be considered an unexceptional battery of questions until one acknowledges they had never before been asked of Black women.

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[11] The narratives assembled in *No Burden to Carry* are the culmination of "Lives of Black Working Women in Ontario," the oral history project coordinated by Brand between 1988 and 1990 in cooperation with six sister interviewers. Toronto's Immigrant Women's Job Placement Centre sponsored the project, and the Ministry of Culture (Heritage Branch) and the Ontario Women's Directorate also contributed financial support.

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[12] Sylvia Hamilton, writing in "Naming Names, Naming Ourselves: A Survey of Early Black Women in Nova Scotia," contributes the following detail about the first arrival of Blacks in Canada: "The African presence in Nova Scotia began in 1605 when the French established a colony at Port-Royal (now Annapolis-Royal). A Black man, Mathieu de Costa, accompanied French fur trader Champlain Du Gua, Sieur de Monts, and explorer Samuel Champlain to the new colony." Hamilton adds, "De Costa was one of Sieur de Monts's most useful men, as he knew the language of the Mi'kmaq and therefore served as interpreter for the French" (*WRH* 14).

Found in the collection's introductory essay, "No Burden to Carry," the reader of *No Burden to Carry* is privy to only a portion of these thirty-odd questions assembled by interviewers. Notably, the question and response elements of the interviews are removed from the published narratives, along with interviewers' commentary or interjections. The erasure both of the interviewers' presence and of the inevitable un-scripted exchanges and banter that arise between interviewers and reporters, along with the absence of the remaining fifteen-plus questions that made up the interviewers' slate, remains a somewhat puzzling omission. I am led to speculate that the temporal and narrative continuity that the editors have constructed with the interview material are intended to heighten the narratives' coherence and thus their impact upon the reader. Perhaps the suppression of the interviewers' incidental contributions is indicative of Brand's commitment to enabling the narrators to tell their own stories; after all, the promotion of self-articulation is consistent with Brand's agenda to encourage and enable Black women—with a minimum of mediation—to communicate herstorical and personal knowledge that might well otherwise remain unheard.[13]

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[13] The exclusion of the interview details from the published narratives is not a point Brand addresses explicitly. However, a tangential connection might be drawn between Brand's objectives for and direction of the documentary *Sisters in the Struggle* and *No Burden to Carry*. In the proposal put forward for *Sisters in the Struggle*, Brand suggests that "[r]ather than personal biographies, the film will be a biography of an idea, an emerging movement, a philosophical debate; a biography of the ideas and strategies brought to bear on the struggle against them[:] racism and sexism by Black women" ("Film Proposal No. 2" 9). Arguably, *No Burden to Carry* is all of these things. But it

Brand does acknowledge in "No Burden to Carry" that disputes did emerge in some of the interviews she conducted and that they led to sometimes-animated exchanges. Her comments about one particular encounter suggest that "that heated point in the interview, where ideas were exchanged instead of absorbed into the tape, deepened the candour of the rest of the interview" (*NBC* 34). There is no reason to assume that such ordinary give and take is not a positive and fruitful offshoot of an essentially interactive dynamic; it should be noted, however, that the dynamic relationship between interviewer and reporter, good intentions aside, is necessarily marked by a power imbalance. It remains somewhat troubling, therefore, that the contextual circumstances of the interviews remain effectively obscured by the omission of questions and interactions from the transcripts. Writing in "Origins," the scholars that comprise the Personal Narratives Group point to narrator-interpreter relations as a problematic factor in what they dub the "'Arthur Munby problem': the power relationships surrounding the production of personal narratives" (13).[14] "Narrators of life histories," the group posits, "inevitably respond to the recorder, even when the latter's questions are intentionally vague and noncoercive [sic]" (13). The nature of Brand's relationship with other women of colour in *No Burden to Carry* is radically different from that of Arthur Munby and

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also includes the oral herstories of its contributors as biographies because it is important to connect these accounts of survival to specific individuals in order to cement ties between the preceding generation of Black women and contemporary generations.

[14] The Personal Narratives Group is a research group affiliated with the Center for Advanced Feminist Studies at the University of Minnesota. At the time of the publication of *Interpreting Women's Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives* (1989), this group comprised Joy Webster Barbre, Amy Farrell, Shirley Nelson Garner, Susan Geiger, Ruth-Ellen Boetcher Joeres, Susan M-A. Lyons, Mary Jo Maynes, Pamela Mittlefehldt, Riv-Ellen Prell, and Virginia Steinhagen.

Hannah Cullwick, whose class and gender differences in the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries set them at near-opposite ends of the English social spectrum.[15]

Having asserted the comparatively egalitarian relationship that defines, in Brand's perception, the sisterhood of Black women, it is curious what remains absent from the recorded discussion. Although Brand avers, *a posteriori*, a comprehensive bond among Black women—the result of common persecution and, hence, a shared, innate understanding—it is clear that this bond is delimited in terms of an assurance of unquestioned acceptance within its sisterhood. Brand acknowledges incidents occurred during the *No Burden to Carry* interviews, episodes when the opinions of the older-generation narrators conflicted with her own endorsement of the Black Power movement and its project in Canada. Brand hails their subsequent debate, and proposes that contrary interpretations instigated breakthroughs for trans-generational understanding.

While this may be the case, the example of the Black Power movement begins to describe a symbolic, unspoken boundary outside of which other topics of discussion remain untouchable. For example, absented from "No Burden to Carry" is any mention of Brand's lesbianism, or of its potential to undermine the bond she lays claim to among Black women. "No Burden to Carry" is a taut and focussed essay, and the exclusion of lesbianism as a subject is, for several reasons, logical. Nonetheless, in light of the overwhelming importance of lesbianism to Brand's political and social perspectives, its utter absence here is a curious one, and would seem to indicate a breach in her caveat that identifying as a collective, for political purposes, must not elide important distinctions within the general constituency, nor obscure agendas that are vital to any given faction.[16]

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[15] Arthur J. Munby (1828–1910), of course, was the Victorian-era upper-class barrister who photographed and wrote about working-class women, principally Hannah Cullwick (1833–1909) who was secretly his wife for thirty-six years. Munby encouraged Cullwick to write her celebrated diaries, and played an integral role in shaping their contents.

Notably, some struggles that extend between interviewers and interviewees came to a head with the publication of *No Burden to Carry*. Opposing concerns between Brand and some of the contributors about the final product reflected quite different perspectives about portrayals of race and class and what they signified. Brand recalls:

> I had one woman say to me she didn't like the book; she didn't like how she sounded. What she meant was she didn't sound like a certain class. I said, "That's the beauty of it, the thing that I wanted to maintain: these sounds that were completely legitimate. And that they bear a kind of homage to your existence.... you got that sound through all those things." An old woman coming up to me saying she didn't like how I made her sound; I said I didn't make you sound like that. I try to *keep* a sound, because that's what's precious about the thing. (Personal interview)

Here, this woman's concern is to erase the cues that reveal her class, a social position over which she had virtually no means of control in the years before or after World War II. *No Burden to Carry*'s analysis of the matrix of labour, race, and gender makes this lack of power apparent. The need to suppress or conceal these facets of one's existence, even toward the end of an exceptional life, bears witness to the very real burden race was, and remains, for these women of colour.

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[16] Mention of lesbianism and the conflict its inclusion in conversation instigates among coworkers does surface elsewhere in Brand's work, notably in *Bread Out of Stone* (14–19; 27; 33; 46), and particularly in discussion of the production of *No Burden to Carry*'s derivative video, *Older, Stronger, Wiser*. Lesbianism is not, apparently, a form of intimacy that can be addressed within the dialogue of *No Burden to Carry*. Perhaps what needs to be noted here is the promotion of identification with the subject position of Black women, but not that of the Black woman made complicated by lesbianism.

Brand suggests that this anxiety came about "[b]ecause their aspirations, albeit to eradicate race, racism, was *also* to hide what they thought was shameful—which is sometimes their very presence, their class, their existence" (Personal interview). The editorial task Brand saw for herself was to preserve the explicit and the subtle evidence that signified these lives but which stood beyond the bounds of the lives the women would have constructed for themselves. "[I]t was my job, in some ways, to uplift the *precious*," says Brand, "even though *nobody* thought it was [precious]. Not even the people themselves, who *want* affirmation and verification, but who have only ever seen it in a certain way," that is, present in white values and norms. The pressing responsibility, then, according to Brand, is to remain attuned to the larger social context within which the women of *No Burden to Carry* matured, adapted, and developed their own strategies of survival in response to a culture that exploited them when possible, and excluded them from its nation-narratives. "[H]ad I listened, in a sense, to a community and not recorded the fracturing, had not recorded the things that happened in small spaces," Brand contends, "then I would have airbrushed what they thought to be shameful, which was, in fact, their life. How did they come about to believe it was shameful, anyway?" (Personal interview). Fortunately, *No Burden to Carry* does not whitewash the social compulsions that led some Blacks to believe that manifestations of race could and should be managed in such a way that they, as Blacks, might appear to be in a position of social parity with the white middle class, despite real socio-economic inequities and disparate civil rights.

Individual narratives

Born in Jamaica in 1900, Violet Blackman immigrated to Canada as an indentured servant in 1920.[17] Her recollection of the job opportunities available to her in Toronto, upon arrival, is that racism regulated, indeed dictated, terms of employment: "You couldn't get any position, regardless who you were and how educated you were, other than housework, because even if the employer would employ you, those that you had to work with would not work with you" (*NBC* 37).[18] The fact that white employees could determine companies' hiring practices by refusing to work with Blacks provides sober evidence of the sturdy cords of racism woven abundantly and securely throughout Toronto's social fibre. After one year's engagement in satisfactory employment, Blackman qualified for landed immigrant status, but this did not forecast improved employment or working conditions. Blackman remarks, "even then the barrier was there: you couldn't go to any of the hospitals to work, or the telephone company and all those different places. There were no nurses in the hospitals—no nothing there—because of colour; they wouldn't have you, even though lots of the people came here was quite qualified" (*NBC* 38).[19]

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[17] Violet Blackman is the only woman whose narrative is included in *No Burden to Carry* who was not born in Canada.

[18] Blackman's experience with the refusal of white workers to work with Blacks parallels that of one male contributor, also Black, to *Rivers Have Sources*. After completing a seven-month course in a machine shop in Galt, Ontario, this individual was referred by the head of the school to General Machine Shop, a company in the area:

> So I went. He [i.e., the school's head] told the guy I was coming. The foreman took me around. We just got about maybe a hundred feet into the place and the lights went out and the machines stopped.
>
> So the foreman said, "Just a minute. What's the trouble?" A guy came forward and said, "You bring that nigger to work in here, we don't work!" The foreman took me aside and said, "well you see, it's not me, it's them." I think he probably set them up. He says, "Do you know how much it costs to turn those machines on?" I looked at him and said, "Man, why don't you fire the bastards?" So I left and went down to Toronto. Couldn't get anything. (149)

Despite his training, the man could not get work in a machine shop. He was hired by the Canadian Pacific Railway and worked as a porter for thirty-seven years.

Not surprisingly, efforts to secure even domestic work could be a challenge. For example, hiring could hinge upon an employer's peculiar logic and preference for light- or dark-skinned women as domestics. Born in St. Catherines in 1911, Bee Allen, like the majority of women in the narratives, began domestic work prior to her sixteenth birthday:

> In service situations I always asked, "Do you hire coloured?" because I did not have financial means to go running up to some place in Rosedale from where I lived and be turned down when I got to the door—that was carfare spent for nothing. Sometimes they would say, "Well, I'm sorry." Other times I would phone, and they would say, "Well, are you dark?" and I would say, "Well, I'm not dark," and then they might say, "I'm sorry, the reason I'm asking is because we'd like our coloured help to be unquestionably coloured." These were domestic jobs; you were going to live in, in many cases, and they did not want to have their friends or relatives wondering at you. (116–17)

Allen's comments highlight the random, arbitrary, and yet controlling, irremediable racism that determined hiring practices. As with later arrivants enrolled in the Domestic

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[19] Writing in *Rivers Have Sources* in 1986, sixty-six years after Violet Blackman's immigration to Canada, Brand and Sri Bhaggiyadatta note that little had changed with respect to the kinds of employment available to immigrants of colour, regardless of the quality of their education:

> Canada is a major labour recipient of the massive brain-drain from the ex-colonial countries. Canada's labour force includes some of the most qualified and schooled "unskilled" workers. The combination of racism and recession, however, has served to de-skill and stunt the aspirations of non-white workers, and make them defer their hopes to their children as their counterparts in Britain did over two decades ago. (107)

Workers Scheme, like Eva Smith in *Older Stronger Wiser*, the "adhocary" of service work affected not only the stability of women's employment but its very possibility as well.

Eventually, de facto restrictions on the kinds of work available to Black women did shift over time. Born in 1923, Marjorie Lewsey points out the shift from domestic to factory work was necessitated principally by the dwindling numbers of white male labourers in Canada during the Second World War. Her mother having lost her eyesight, Lewsey, who was sixteen in 1939, left school to go to work:

> There weren't too many jobs. The first job I had was working in a factory; the place was called Reliable Toy. Quite a few Blacks left the education system because there was no future for us. We knew it. I went out and worked at Reliable Toy. I think it was five dollars a week—that was big money in those days....
>
> After Reliable Toy, I worked in a factory down on John Street; they made suits. There was lots of that domestic work, going and cleaning up other people's dirty place. Really and truly, we weren't allowed to go into factory work until Hitler started the war, and then they'd beg you, "Would you like a job in my factory?" But we weren't allowed in. We were left more or less to clean their dirty houses. Which I *never* did, I'll tell you that. (243).

Lewsey's contempt for the demands and degradation of in-service work is anything but subtle. Not surprisingly, the admission of Black women into positions of factory labour renewed the precedent established during the slavery era that affirmed their suitability for demanding physical labour. These classes of employment included those that whites no longer wanted to perform, or those that white labour forces could not sustain because of low numbers resulting from changes in social stratification. In much the same way that exploitative hiring practices have come to exemplify capitalism's mercenary nature, the employment in Canada of white women and of people of colour in non-traditional roles during the Second World War—albeit necessitated by global conditions of war—reflected measures of opportunism in the manipulation of existing labour pools.

Lewsey later indicates (and Brand is quick to corroborate) that efforts made by the Canadian government to encourage the movement of women into factory positions, to fill labour shortages generated by men who left those jobs to enter the armed forces, were not directed expressly at Black women; neither, for that matter, was the government motivated by a benevolent interest in the rights of Black or white women to work. Ruth Roach Pierson emphasizes, "The recruitment of women was part of a large-scale intervention by Government into the labour market to control allocation of labour for effective prosecution of the war" (qtd. in Brand, "We weren't allowed" 178). Brand adds that new employment options available to Black women were incidental rather than calculated, for it was not the case that

> racial desegregation [was] an objective of the war effort. Ghettoized up to then in domestic work of one sort or another—mother's helpers, housekeeping, laundry work, general help—Black women were released by the war effort from the racialized, segregated, female employment that domestic work was for them, and were given entry into industrial labour and clerical work. ("We weren't allowed" 179)

For her part, Bee Allen, born in 1911, recognized and seized the opportunity the war afforded her to leave domestic work behind: "I got this opportunity to go work in the shoe factory; once I got into working in the shoe factory then I never went back to domestic service. I never did because I felt I had now an opening tool" (*NBC* 117–18). Though virtually coincidental, the opportunities that came derived from the loosening grip of domestic employment was an opportunity embraced by those newly eligible to partake of alternative forms of labour.

Brand underscores more than once the pragmatic nature of Black women's employment in industries that had heretofore been closed to them. It is with regard to shifts in employment patterns necessitated by the war that Brand once again contextualizes a perspective formulated by Robin Winks. Winks, who asserts "the total impact of World War II was an educational one for white and black," proposes that this period resulted in "bettering the status of the Negro worker—in and out of uniform—throughout Canada and The North" (*NBC* 20). Brand's take on material and social conditions counters Winks's liberal interpretation of war-time opportunities: "racism did not so much decrease," she maintains, "as that mobilization for the war effort made it expedient to do away with some of the more primitive racial restrictions in order to free all the productive forces in the service of winning the war" (21).[20] For not only did white women rise in the labour hierarchy to fill the gap left by white men, Black women moved to fill a range of jobs newly available to them, formerly occupied by white women. The pragmatic and economically sound management of racism, it appears, merely evolved to allow Blacks into blue-collar positions no longer required by whites to sustain the lifestyle to which they had become accustomed.

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[20] Citing the work of Jacqueline Jones, Brand points out that—like the gains made by white women in employment outside the home—advances in the kinds of employment available to Black women were abruptly curtailed at the end of the Second World War. In "Black Women Workers Demobilised and Redomesticated," from her study *Labour of Love, Labour of Sorrow*, Jones writes:

> A government researcher noted that reconversion affected Negroes more severely than white workers: from July 1945 to April 1946, for example, unemployment rates among non-whites increased more than twice as much as among whites....

Ruth Roach Pierson reports, "By mid 1943 there were labour shortages in service jobs long dependent on female (*i.e., white*) labour. Women were leaving these for higher paying employment in war industries. Hospitals, restaurants, hotels, laundries, and dry cleaners were clamouring for help, but the labour pool of single women available for full time employment was exhausted" (qtd. in Brand, "We weren't allowed" 181). Slowly, the ground floor of economic integration moved above physical labour, as the experience of Eleanor Hayes bears out:

> When I was in high school the girls who wanted to take commercial courses or secretarial courses, they weren't encouraged to do so. We were told, "Well, who would want to hire you?" There were a few businesses that would hire you but very, very, very few!
>
> There are women today living here in Toronto who were the first this and the first that: the first Black secretary in the government is living today; the first Black nurse to train in a hospital is living today; the first Black to work in Eaton's is living today. (*NBC* 207–08)

By 1948 most of the gains that Blacks had derived from the wartime boom had been wiped out, and labour analysts predicted that, given the persistent marginality of Black workers, their well-being depended almost entirely on a strong economy. (qtd. in *NBC* 26–27)

It is worth noting that the "today" identified in Hayes's comments would be between 1988 and 1990. Hayes' recounting relays both the new possibilities and the ongoing restriction around employment. While the labour market was eager to absorb new workers, deeply embedded racism within the white labour force continued to exercise a degree of control over the incorporation and integration of Blacks into traditionally white labour spaces. Hayes continues:

> That's where the openings were—garment factories or knitting mills—anything that wasn't too, too visible. The excuse they had was that the other [i.e., white] employees might object. Now you hear them say that there's no discrimination here, but it's beneath the surface. But it wasn't beneath the surface then—they were very, very frank about it. (210)

In order to offset the lack of freedom of choice in the realm of employment, many of the women in Toronto whose narratives *No Burden to Carry* includes took on organizational roles in establishing alternatives to the white-owned restaurants, churches, nightclubs, and meeting halls that disallowed Blacks on the premises or at social functions. The introduction of Marcus Garvey's United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) into Toronto in 1919, and the subsequent purchase of the building at 355 College Street in the1920s, in particular, secured a physical space for social contact that allowed for the establishment of community events that then flourished.[21] Acquisition of the College Street building was motivated by a desire to provide Garvey with a forum in which the UNIA could hold national conventions and thus avoid in future the frustrations met with when white landlords refusals to rent space for conventions. The College Street building and the coordinated efforts of UNIA members to raise the funds required for the building's purchase produced changes in Toronto's Black community that would endure long after Garvey's final Canadian visit in 1936, when he presided over the International Convention of the Negro Peoples of the World.

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[21] The UNIA later changed its name to the Universal African Improvement Association (UAIA).

The social significance of the purchase of the UNIA building, and the opportunities for community development that came with ownership, is a theme that surfaces in many of *No Burden to Carry*'s narratives. The building provided a site where community groups and cultural activities contributed to the development of strong social cohesion, a sense of belonging in an otherwise dismissive and hostile social and political environment. For Blackman, involvement in the UNIA proved to be a transformative force in her life in Toronto:

> I can't remember when the UNIA was formulated, but I remember a friend came to where I was working in service—after I was here a year—and invited me this Sunday to go down to the UNIA, and when I went I liked it very much and I joined. From then I became an active member—I never missed a Sunday—and I worked with it. I was in everything. At that time I had a voice; I was in the choir—I was in everything in the UNIA 'cause I liked it all my life once I got in there and saw how interesting it was.
>
> They had everything: they had their own brass band, they had a choir, they used to put on plays, different plays, and we had even a Prince from Africa came [sic]. And it was wonderful, wonderful! This is why I put all my labour, all my time in it. (*NBC* 40)

Although Blackman's claim to "having a voice" at that time is made in reference to the choir, it is amply evident that her "voice" was also part of, and was heard within, a highly organized community association bent on the establishment of a self-reliant social network. Blackman, in comments about the UNIA, shifts from referring to herself alone—from "I"—to a collaborative "we," indicative of her participation in an association larger than herself in reach, scope, and means. As in other comments about the UNIA, her enthusiasm rises off the page as she describes a real cultural and social prosperity:

> We used to have different recitals, socials. We had everything that you could ever think of: we had dinners; we had dances—there was nothing that you lacked coming there. Every day of the week was something going on up in the UNIA.
>
> We had the ladies. We had a committee—I formed a committee—and each lady was responsible for either putting on a dinner or putting on a social, putting on a dance. We didn't work like individuals. When any of the ladies are putting on anything I work with them just equally because that's the only way you can work with people—my people especially, don't feel you're above them because you hold a position—so we all was responsible, and though I was the chairlady, anything I did had to go to the heads, to the president or the treasurer, and then I would come back to the committee. I was responsible for the things that goes on and for the money that is being made, and then I'd take it to the association. I worked hands and heart.... we all would share equally, wonderful. I miss all those things—the UNIA was my heart and my soul and my life. (41)

Blackman's experience typifies a collaborative, uplifting association that appears democratic in the very best sense of collective involvement and community support for individual initiative. A system of accountability, of checks and balances, ensured stability and broad consent.

Despite the sentimental, and perhaps idealized, descriptions of the benefits of the UNIA milieu, Blackman's commentary nevertheless articulates the importance and need for such a centre, indirectly signifying the repressive social, economic, and political framework within which the UNIA and the College Street centre evolved. Refusal by white society to engage with Blacks as equals, and the exclusionary, discriminatory practices of white-owned businesses, forced the emergence of a Black-contained social world. Blackman describes what those conditions were like for Black Torontonians when she says,

> [w] e had such a hard time, the coloured people. The UNIA after we bought it, all the different lodges used to come because they couldn't get any other places. They used to come to the UNIA to rent and things like that. Then no sooner the white world open, they can go in, they leave the UNIA, and we wouldn't be asking them half what the whites asking them because they had to pay for going in, whatever it is. (41–42)

While the UNIA provided a much needed hub for community focus, the development of human and cultural potential, and self-sustaining action, the cultural capital inherent in white businesses and establishments was a draw for many Blacks, in particular the young, and proved hard to resist when the opportunities began to present themselves.

Disparate attitudes about unobtrusive assimilation, on one side, and full-scale integration, on the other, divided the generation that first built the foundations and the assembly hall of Black community and culture in Toronto from that which fought against self- and externally-imposed exclusion. Ironically, it was likely the gradually-increasing, hard-won economic gains realized by the older generation of Blacks that made their socio-cultural milieu as fulfilling as it was, while the increased economic integration the younger generation experienced made the imbalance in correspondent social integration all the more intolerable. While the *No Burden to Carry* narratives highlight many individual struggles aimed at improving individual rights, it becomes evident in *Rivers Have Sources* that the trend in claiming social parity involved massive collaborative efforts to achieve better education and employment opportunities, and to eradicate racial violence perpetrated by branches of government. Brand recalls of her own experience,

> [t]he older people just found these younger people too uppity, too in-the-face, and that was *not* the way they had done it, and that was *not* the way to go about it….. when I got there in 1970, there was a conflict between the older generation, whose counsel was, "take time, don't be too obnoxious and you'll get by." And the younger, 1970s kind of students and whatever generation who said, "fuck off." (Personal interview)

For the younger generation, simply getting by was not enough. Coming on the heels of the American Civil Rights movement, and in the midst of the Black Power movement and Pan-African independence struggles, the rejection of quiet assimilation in favour of deliberate, pro-active confrontation was very much a sign of the times. No doubt, the agenda of the 1970s generation of Blacks appeared to be a rejection of the kind of equilibrium that the UNIA movement had achieved.

The profit of collective experience

Nellie Y. McKay's essay on Black women's spiritual autobiographies differs from *No Burden to Carry* in focus, national location, and genre. Nevertheless, McKay's observations about the potential of autobiography to function as a collectivizing statement resonate with the capacity of *No Burden to Carry* to articulate common experiences. "[T]he centrality and importance of the individual life initially motivates all autobiographical impulse," McKay affirms; "in black autobiography this 'act of consciousness' in the present bears the weight of transcending the history of race, caste, and/or gender oppression for an entire group" (140). Autobiography is able to effect this transformation because the confluence of personal narratives "[compels] a revisionary reading of the collective American experience, as specific situations and individual acts of memory and imagination [yield] to identifiable patterns within the larger cultural context" (140). In the distinctive geographical, social, and political Canadian framework, collective social experience is inevitably divergent.

In their Canadian context, *Rivers Have Sources* and *No Burden to Carry* work to harness the collective wisdom provoked and necessitated by the disenfranchisement and exploitation imposed upon people of colour. In so doing, *Rivers Have Sources* and *No Burden to Carry* accomplish three tasks: (1) they offer historical contexts and account for the conditions faced by peoples of colour, and specifically Black working women, in Ontario; (2) these accounts are made available to current generations so they might affirm and compare their own confrontations with racism; and (3) the works make public the strategies and analyses of those who have been proactive in their confrontations with, and circumvention of, racist social structures and restrictions. "I was curious about Black experience in the country as a whole," writes Brand about her motivation to produce *No Burden to Carry*, "but even more curious about it from the point of view of Blacks who had lived here for generations. How did women live within communities so besieged? I wanted to recover the everyday detail of their lives, to ask them how it was, and what they did to survive" (*NBC* 33). The validation of common experiences with racism and the encouragement made possible by the endowment of survival strategies is especially significant when the de-naturalizing, de-contextualizing framing language of "isolated events" and "exceptions" is mobilized to blur lived experience that makes institutional racism operable.

Writing about the interviewers, those interviewed, and of the social dynamics at play in the development of *No Burden to Carry*, Brand maintains that an identifiable, singular form of collectivity among Black women derives from shared encounters with systemic racism, producing a bond unequalled elsewhere:

> Naturally, all of the interviewers were Black women, so at the beginning of the interviews there was an implicit understanding of being in something together. What we were in together was the condition of being Black women, a relation distinct from any other relation existing between people not of this group and distinct from relations with people outside this group. We shared assessments, situations, methods of thought and patterns of the culture to which we belonged.

> There was an understanding that we were exploited. We were wronged together. (33)

The identification and elaboration of an experiential and discursive coalition is one example of Brand's work as an organic intellectual: her commitment is to bring to critical consciousness the material particulars of a social class so that a thorough understanding of its shared function of that class within the relations of production can be elucidated. From this mutual awareness, a philosophy of praxis can evolve that enables the formulation of proactive strategies to reform the relations of production and hegemonic constraints that obtain.

Joan W. Scott, in her celebrated article "Experience," argues that in efforts to recuperate the history of groups previously excluded from mainstream historical production, it is requisite that any body of marginalized experience is not accepted uncritically as either transparent or somehow essentially representative. This precautionary maxim might appear at first glance to fly in the face of *No Burden to Carry*'s project—one clear objective of which is this very filling-out of previously elided personal herstories—or of *Rivers Have Sources*—which aims to project the voices of people of colour as expert witnesses of their own experience. Scott proposes an interpretive framework within which to locate and examine lived experience while positioning the subject within historical context; space must be provided to evaluate the discursive, post-structural elements that can and do generate a range of interpretations of experience. She writes:

> Making visible the experience of a different group exposes the existence of repressive mechanisms, but not the inner workings or logics; we know that

> difference exists, but we don't understand it as constituted relationally. For that we need to attend to the historical processes that, through discourse, position subjects and produce their experiences. It is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience. Experience in this definition then becomes not the origin of our explanation, not the authoritative (because seen or felt) evidence that grounds what is known, but rather that which we seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced. To think about experience in this way is to historicize it as well as to historicize the identities it produces. (59–60)

The primary purpose of Brand's introductory essay "No Burden to Carry," and the framework of analytical commentary Brand and Sri Bhaggiyadatta build throughout *Rivers Have Sources*, do, in the language of Gayatri Spivak, "make visible the assignment of subject-positions" to marginalized citizens who, nonetheless, generate community, self-reliance, and self-advocacy (qtd. in Scott 65). These textual supplements perform authorial, tactical interventions: they articulate the systemic nature of subject formation. The authors' framing commentary attempts to deconstruct the mechanics of hegemony to prevent the two collections from foundering in mere self-absorption. If one takes account of the overall historicizing and contextualizing project of the two collections, and reads them in a "literary" (Scott 66) sense, rather than as non-subjective historical evidence, then the reader is led to

> understand the operations of the complex and changing discursive processes by which identities are ascribed, resisted, or embraced, and which [material] processes themselves are unremarked, indeed achieve their effect because they

> aren't noticed. To do this[,] a change of [historical] object seems to be required, one which takes the emergence of concepts and identities as historical events in need of explanation. (Scott 65)

Scott argues here for recognition of the discursive nature of subject formation, the capacity of auto-/biography to reveal its own contradictions, logics, and interpretations. She recognizes the potential of text to be self-reflexive and incomplete, and proposes a reading that rejects subjectivity as an innate human inevitability.

Scott's reading of history, of evidence, relies upon the discrepancy between language and things—the Saussurean slippage between signifier and signified—that requires "all categories of analysis" be understood "as contextual, contested, and contingent" (68). As such, such "categories of analysis" are inherently generative within the overall realm of possibilities described by the discursive whole: that is, what has been uttered and what has yet to be. Scott reads identity as the product of a "discursive event" (66), and consequently the agency of the non-unified subject is always in process:

> Being a subject means being 'subject to definite conditions of existence, conditions of endowment of agents[,] and conditions of exercise.'[22] These conditions enable choices, through they are not unlimited. Subjects are constituted discursively, experience is a linguistic event (it doesn't happen outside established meanings), but neither is it confined to a fixed order of meaning. Since discourse is by definition shared, experience is collective as well as

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[22] This quotation is drawn from Parveen Adams and Jeff Minson's "The Subject of Feminism" in *m/f* 2 (1978) : 52.

> individual. Experience is a subject's history. Language is the site of history's enactment. Historical explanation cannot, therefore, separate the two. (66)

The result of cultivating the narratives of individuals (in their own voices), which ultimately combine to describe social, political, and economic structural patterns—despite the contingency and contested nature of their operation—is the production, perhaps the emancipation, of a distinct recombinant form of memory. The pattern of enabling a collaborative memory is one Brand develops in *Rivers Have Sources* and *No Burden to Carry*; it is also a pattern she repeats in other individual and collaborative projects in order to elicit the "identifiable patterns within the larger cultural context" which McKay writes about. When these articulations acquire a critical mass, revisionary readings of the experiences of race and gender in Toronto, specifically, and peoples of colour in Ontario more generally, are mobilized against the naturalizing project of mainstream Canadian history.

Chapter 3

Common Sense and Capitalism: Racism, Sexism, and Class

> We cannot live under the present system; it exploits and degrades us. Given the locations of our oppressions, the struggle is by nature working-class, anti-sexist, anti-racist, and anti-imperialist. It is to be fought in the factories and the offices, in the houses we clean for a living, in our homes and against state legislation, against capitalism.
> ~ Dionne Brand, "A Working Paper on Black Women in Toronto: Gender, Race and Class"

> Every time I pick up my pen a fear stops me which makes me want to water down my words, question my authority and hold back the power in me to express myself. The fear largely derives from our relationship with the larger society. It is a relationship which has always been filled with ambivalence and hostility.
>
> ……………………………………………………………
>
> Let our voices be heard and let us participate in the creation of a world where not only the colour of a (wo)man's skin will be insignificant but also where the sex of an individual is no barrier to their personal development and their opportunity to contribute to the total development of the race and humanity.
> ~ Makeda Silvera, "An Open Letter to Rastafarian Sistrens"

I concluded the previous chapter with a brief examination of Joan W. Scott's article "Experience," wherein she proposes that the incorporation of individual accounts into the dominant historical record, particularly accounts of marginalized and silenced populations, can be tremendously beneficial in rarifying popular understandings of constituency. The work of Dionne Brand makes such accounts accessible: oral herstories, anecdotes, and testimonials problematize habitual perspectives on the interaction of nation, ideologies, and institutions. Scott, however, counsels against an incautious acceptance of autobiographical accounts at face value—as ideal touchstones to judge the validity or fullness of popular history, or as wholesale replacements for them. Rather than focus uncritically on personal histories as a mode of redemption of the historically authentic, she cautions that autographical reports, like mainstream history, require the scrutiny of deconstruction. Under inspection, she avers, experience becomes "that which we seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced" (60). Experience does not constitute absolute knowledge in and of itself.

I also closed the last chapter with the claim that Brand, and her co-authors where applicable, takes pains to contextualize the narratives and the signifying of her work. By this I mean to suggest Brand's scholarship enables readers to better understand the "emergence of concepts and identities as historical events in need of explanation" (Scott 65). Her essay "No Burden to Carry," for example, and the editorial analysis with which Brand and Sri Bhaggiyadatta link the chapters of *Rivers Have Sources*, provide frameworks within which to view the events, practices, and the functional cultural and capital investments of Canadian society that converge upon the bodies of women and men of colour.

This chapter examines a range of essays that Brand has authored independently or with one or more collaborators. The essays address how a tangle of issues—race and racism, gender, class location, sexual orientation, and patriarchy—affect the ability of women of colour to participate in mainstream expressions of feminism and Black Power.

The "Women of Colour" Issue

In the spring of 1983, *Fireweed* was the first feminist journal in Canada to produce a volume dedicated to the expression and the concerns of women of colour.[1] The *Fireweed* editorial Guest Collective, managed by Fireweed Collective members Nila Gupta and Makeda Silvera, included Himani Bannerji, Dionne Brand, and Prabha Khosla. In an editorial entitled "We Were Never Lost," Silvera and Gupta, on behalf of the Guest Collective, waste no time staking out their territory and the objectives of *Fireweed* 16, the "Women of Colour" issue. The two describe the somewhat peculiar, and to them suspicious, circumstances under which the issue came to be produced.

In 1981, Silvera and Brand approached the Fireweed Collective to propose an issue that would be edited by and dedicated solely to women of colour. The Fireweed Collective rejected the idea but returned eighteen months later to invite Silvera and Brand to draw together just such an issue. Brand and Silvera were wary of the Fireweed Collective's change of heart, and questioned their motivation. Silvera and Gupta pondered:

> "Why Now?" we wondered. Our past dealings with the collective had been marked by their refusal to acknowledge that women of colour should have full editorial control over the production of an issue which would explore our lives.... Did *Fireweed* now feel the climate was right? Was it now "politically correct" to devote an issue to women of colour? Would this issue be seen as "taking care of"

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[1] In her introduction to *Fireworks: The Best of Fireweed*, Makeda Silvera writes that the aim of the Fireweed Guest Collective was "to publish 'works by a diversity of women' because 'people not of the dominant culture have not had active participation in, or access to, arts journals, whether these have been part of the dominant culture or have emerged from the small presses'" (qtd. in Hunter 45).

> the matter? Having been "discovered" by white feminists[,] would women of colour then see the repetition of an herstorical pattern within the feminist movement which had consistently dealt with our concerns in a token fashion at best and most often not at all[?] (5)

Oddly and unfortunately, the two neglect to answer in their editorial any of the queries they raise. Nonetheless, the questions reveal, on the one hand, a great deal about the troubled chronicle of interaction between themselves and the predominantly white Fireweed Collective; on the other hand, they reflect foundational conflicts between women of colour and the white feminist movement at large.

The Guest Collective's evident distrust is a by-product of the co-optive practices of a white feminist movement that had, on prior occasions, found valuable the symbolic capital that women of colour lent to their association—"because," as Brand remarks elsewhere, "we've always meant some kind of radical idea—but [the white feminist movement] did not seek to address the specificities of Black women's oppression" (qtd. in Bannerji, "We Appear" 11). Writing in part one of "Black Women and Work: The Impact of Racially Constructed Gender Roles on the Sexual Division of Labour," Brand remarks,

> The reason resistance to the racial and sexual division of labour was not and is not seen within the context of the struggle for women's rights has more to do with the observers than with the phenomenon. The dualities of capital and labour, male and female, Black and white constitute not only social dichotomies but also hierarchies upon which both material and symbolic power are based. (34)

The gap between Black and white feminists and their discontinuous agendas is a theme that runs unbroken throughout analyses penned by Black women about the two movements. This rift is attributable in large part to evidence that white middle-class women were predominantly dissatisfied with their positions as a consequence of their gender rather than their class (28), and that they failed to grasp the correlation between the two subject positions particularly as they combine to affect Black women. In this context, class structures persist as a fragmenting divide: class effectively isolates socio-political interests into discretionary categories based on class positions and on disparate investments in the maintenance or disassembly of social hegemony.

"We Were Never Lost" also echoes the enduring anxiety of women of colour over the threat of mere token representation within mainstream movements and socio-cultural organizations, a concern rooted in encounters with institutions such as the NFB and exercised in the phenomenon of the "extraordinary portrait" (263), for example, of which Martineau writes.[2] Similarly, the concerns of Black women about absorption into socially dominant groups stem from participation in the white feminist movement and the Black Power movement, both of which had a tendency to utilize women of colour to swell their numbers, and thus their political influence, but valued neither their priorities nor their contributions beyond logistical support.[3]

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[2] The malady of token representation is one that surfaces throughout the narratives of Brand's film work and non-fiction, in her artistic endeavours and activism. Speaking of Clair Prieto, Brand remarked in our interview on one such experience: "this was many years ago, where she had put forward a proposal for a film—she and her then partner, Roger McTair.... And they had gotten the response that, 'Oh, we've done our Black film already....' And so you also encounter in these institutions that *take* on Black presence" (Personal interview). It is impossible to conceive of the NFB rejecting a film proposal because it "had done its *white* film already." To pursue this sort of thinking to its logical conclusion would suggest that the NFB has produced entirely too many films already.

Despite well-founded reasons to hesitate, the Fireweed Guest Collective evidently "decided to use this medium, first to reach out to women of colour and second, to educate white feminists" ("Never Lost" 5).

In print: currents of (mis)representation

The issues that enter public discourse are determined in large part by who has access to forums for public exchange and channels of dissemination. Not surprisingly, a mode of discourse determines and defines the key signifiers in a system of critique and does so in accordance with those who utilize it; a given mode of discourse also establishes the framework within which analyses take shape. Inevitably, a group's connections with, or its exclusion from, hegemony's communication mainstays delimits the kinds of social evaluation that group is likely prepared to instigate. To the extent that white feminists are unprepared to examine the sources of what Silvera calls their "white skin privilege, [or] take responsibility for the power they wield in this society," the respective discourses of Black and mainstream feminisms will inevitably diverge (Bannerji, "Organising" 61). For women of colour, this dynamic implies a practical embargo on access to publication outlets, while their agendas suffer from reduced rights of entry into public forums of social critique. Silvera asserts "there are many of us who write, they [i.e., white feminists] just don't want to read it; they don't want to publish it. Reading and publishing our work would definitely force white women to look at themselves, at racism and at what has been laid on us for years" ("We Appear" 11). The practical and symbolic impact, therefore, of *Fireweed*'s "Women of Colour" issue become manifest in this environment of suppressed articulation.

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[3] The contribution of Black women's participation in Black Power events and rallies as helpers rather than speakers is mentioned often in Brand's *Sisters in the Struggle*.

Cheryl Clarke, in "The Failure to Transform: Homophobia in the Black Community," observes of the Black Power movement that "While the cult of Black Power spurned the assimilationist goals of the politically conservative black bourgeoisie, it's devotees, nevertheless, held firmly to the value of heterosexual and male superiority" (198).

The title of *Fireweed* 16's editorial, "We Were Never Lost," disputes the supposed invisibility of women of colour in the realm of publications and feminist discourse; it challenges the alleged lack of availability of contributions by these women. Writing in "The Production of Free Speech is the Production of Consent in the Management of Culture," Brand and Sri Bhaggiyadatta make the case that this apparent invisibility is, in fact, a direct consequence of "[e]ffective political censorship [that] ranges from the exclusion of information, images, experiences of [marginalized] groups within the society to the design and reproduction of images of the non-A[dvanced] C[apitalist] C[ountries]" (17).[4] More immediately relevant to issues of accessible print format and the exercise of influence within the white feminist movement, however, is the perceived discrepancy between establishment and non-establishment modes of discourse and what counts as *speaking*.

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[4] As one example of the asymmetrical media coverage garnered by mainstream versus oppositional movements, a contributor to *Rivers Have Sources* tells of a rally and conference organized in the space of a week to contest a conference on immigration planned by "a liberal business-backed organization called the Canadian Institute of Public Affairs." The Institute invited two individuals to speak on immigration: "One was an ex-immigration officer who was with the National Citizens Coalition, a business group that used to rail against non-white immigration. The other was an author who'd written a book that argued the English in Canada were being swamped." The opposing group, the Ad-hoc Committee for Immigrants' Rights Against Racism, picketed the offending conference. The individual comments: "We picketed their meeting and had our own. We got more people than they did.... We got a lot of local publicity, but they got more publicity across the country. One guy in their organization worked for Southam News.

Collectively, these are the subjects taken up in a two-part round-table discussion comprising Bannerji, Silvera, Gupta, Khosla, and Brand. Recorded in "We Appear Silent to People Who are Deaf to What We Say," Brand remarks on the subordinate relationship of women of colour to the white feminist mainstream: "They like us to join with them and struggle with them—but just as a symbol. We don't even have to say anything. It's worth it to them if we are completely illiterate or at least appear that way" (11). Bannerji posits a critique from an alternative tack, however, when she proposes it is not that women of colour have nothing to say and therefore cause white feminists to turn a deaf ear: instead, "it's *how* they say it. There is only one way of 'saying' that counts. In that sense, they are forcing all the most middle[-]class, the most male bourgeois ways of speaking and doing things on us. And if you don't do things that way … you're not 'saying' it right" (11).

Gramsci explains language in a manner that confirms Bannerji's assertions about the consequences of "not 'saying' it right":

> It seems that one can say that "language" is essentially a collective term…. Language also means culture and philosophy (if only at the level of common sense) and therefore the fact of "language" is in reality a multiplicity of facts more or less organically coherent and co-ordinated. At the limit it could be said that

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Every time he wrote a story it was carried by fifty newspapers as a personal column. He never mentioned us" (*RHS* 173).

> every speaking being has a personal language of his own.... Culture, at its various levels, unifies in a series of strata, to the extent that they come into contact with each other, a greater or lesser number of individuals who understand each other's mode of expression in differing degrees, etc. It is these historico-social distinctions and differences which are reflected in common language and produce ... "obstacles" and "sources of error".... (*Prison* 349)

It is these nodes, where various linguistic strata resonate, that I call linguistic registers. Inevitably, linguistic registers—that is, patterns of discourse generally associated with subject positions constituted by common experiences of race, gender, class, formal education, and life learning—propagate particular readings of the world we live in and the manner in which that learning is articulated. Predictably, an individual invests considerably in the linguistic register that helps her conceptualize and concretize the world she inhabits.

As the comments of the round-table-discussion participants highlight, different modes of social, interactive discourse legitimate particular modes of demotic speech and validate certain life experiences while shelving others. Social validation of specific language as constituting meaningful, creditable communication—communication worthy of being heard, regardless of one's "'saying' it right," as it were—is determined by the dominant social group. The women who participated in this round-table discussion found that being heard to "speak" by white women was very much dependent on the compatibility of objectives and linguistic registers.

Not surprisingly, in the estimation of the Guest Collective, the significance of material in *Fireweed* 16 hinges principally on its potential to nurture a sense of social cohesion, a community that shares common concerns over marginalization and exploitation, and with the cultivation of a productive engagement with literacy. Lynette Hunter suggests that marginalized populations tend to suffer from non-literacy, that is, "while they can read and write they do not recognize or possibly accept that writing/reading is a helpful way of communicating" (33). *Fireweed* 16 sets out to counter specifically this kind of non-literacy.

While the value and pervasiveness of written forms of communication are recognized facts for individuals fully engaged with mainstream society, disenfranchised populations have little impetus to become active in print culture if what material they do come into contact with fails to reflect their concerns, or if they do not envision literacy as a tool that can positively alter their reality. Hunter comments:

> If you don't recognize your position to be marginalized, or more important if you perceive it as necessary, you do not begin to articulate it in any medium and so you remain marginalized.... If you are not aware of the social possibilities in reading and writing or again if you cannot see a way to participating in them, then you do not attempt to use the medium and so you remain non-literate. (46)

In fact, Hunter asserts, "reading and writing are the gateway into social participation and can create extended and supportive communities" (46). Paulo Freire speaks to this point in *Pedagogy of Hope*. He writes:

> Here is one of the tasks of democratic popular education, of a pedagogy of hope: that of enabling the popular classes to develop their language: not the authoritarian, sectarian gobbledygook of 'educators,' but their own language—which, emerging from and returning upon their reality, sketches out the

> conjectures, the designs, the anticipations of their new world. Here is one of the central questions of popular education—that of language as a route to the invention of citizenship. (39)

It stands to reason, therefore, that women of colour, as in the case of the Fireweed Guest Collective, would elect to represent social issues and priorities by exercising exclusive editorial control in order to elicit contributions from other women of colour, and to do so, if for no other reason, than to create a safe space for that articulation, and to provide that community with a catalyst with which to coalesce.

Silvera and Gupta assert that provision of a safe space for the expression of women of colour in the realm of print culture demands a departure from mainstream aesthetic and literary models. For the project of *Fireweed* 16, they explain,

> [o]ur criteria was [sic] that contributions be from women of colour and be on their experience as women or as visible peoples. What we selected for publication was chosen according to a combination of artistic and political standards. Our major concern was to choose works that communicated. But we made a conscious decision to reject white male literary standards that have been used to still the voices of people of colour of both sexes. ("Never Lost" 6)

That the principal ambition of the Guest Collective was to select "articles that *communicated*" (emphasis added) to Black women, underscores the ideally and intensely practical nature of expression in the pursuit and formation of collective agency. Just as art in the Black community performs and informs political and activist agendas (as do Brand's videos, or the work of Nolan and Channer, for example), so too do "articles that [communicate]" the lived conditions of women of colour facilitate the development of social agency and collective will.

Gramsci proposes that a "collectivity must be understood as the product of an elaboration of collective will and thought reached through the concrete effort of individuals, and not through a fatalist process alien to individuals" (qtd. in Salamini 65). The Guest Collective's commitment to direct the production, and determine the content, of *Fireweed* 16 is the enactment of that "elaboration of collective will and thought." In this respect, the Guest Collective performs the role of what Gramsci calls the "collective intellectual," who, like the organic intellectual or the party, "[exercises] cultural, ideological, and moral direction" (Salamini 67). In the instance of *Fireweed* 16, these three elements are amply manifest in the written text, the photographs, and the art this issue contains: the ideological implication of positioning expression by women of colour at the centre of the project, and the moral determination to pursue publication of the issue under the editorial leadership of women of colour, demonstrates a coherent sense of purpose and community.

Hunter proposes: "If literacy is not just technical reading or writing but also the recognition of the importance of writing and reading in forming communities, engaging with and participating in them, then many women are frequently only marginally literate" (46). As the product of an organic intellectual project, *Fireweed* 16 encourages women not normally engaged with "literacy" to exploit it as form and forum, to increase awareness of common dilemmas and thereby reduce the isolation and silence that in part produce and maintain their subaltern position.

In addition to the first half of the roundtable discussion held by the Guest Collective's members (a significant contribution on its own), *Fireweed* 16 features articles that address some of the chief experiences of poor women of colour living and working in Canada: Khosla's "Profiles of Working Class East Indian Women" comprises interviews with immigrant women who work in clothing sweatshops in Metro Toronto, in the apple orchards of BC's Fraser and Okanagan valleys, and who suffer from a lack of union representation in these and other low-wage labour positions; similarly, "Silenced," by Silvera, includes excerpts from her larger work with the same title that examines the experiences of West Indian women working in Canada within the framework of the Domestic Workers Scheme. Karen Pheasant's "Cultural Retention, Cultural Ties" presents an aboriginal woman's account of the comfort and support she drew from her involvement with the Friendship Centre movement; as well, she discusses the skills she developed and brought to bear, through her role as Executive Director, to step up the movement's emphasis on cultural development and retention. *Fireweed* 16 also includes poetry and short stories; "Images of Black Women," photographs by Claire Preito and Roger McTair; and reviews of Joy Kogawa's *Obasan* and Brand's *Primitive Offensive*. "Lesbians of Colour: Loving and Struggling—'A Conversation Between Three Lesbians of Colour,'" speaks to the battle inherent in being a Black lesbian feminist in a Black community, and of the difficulties of being Black and lesbian in a white lesbian or feminist community that doubts Black women's capacity to be either lesbian or feminist.

Esmeralda Thornhill contributes an article entitled "Black Women's Studies in Teaching Related to Women: Help or Hindrance to Universal Sisterhood?" It focuses attention on academia and the disregard for distinctions of race prevalent in universities' women's studies departments, their fundamental failure to grasp the "philosophical underpinnings" (78) of racial marginalization. Thornhill writes of the need "to assess critically and reevaluate [the] very sources" of historical information and ideological formation privileged by Canadian women's studies programmes "in order to avoid perpetuating oppressive mechanisms and structures … consciously or unconsciously" (79). Silvera's "An Open Letter to Rastafarian Sistrens" tackles yet one more Black "movement which speaks of liberation, perfect love and fights against black and white oppressors" but still "oppress[es] women" (119) while it discourages alliances and communication among them. Silvera admonishes sistrens who have bought into Rastafarian tenets of women's inferiority and those who thwart the establishment of female alliances.

Also notable are three anonymous accounts by women of colour that fill the back pages of *Fireweed* 16. They describe confrontations with racist whites and the resistance offered in response, the difficulty of coming out as a lesbian in the Black community, and the struggle of a Fijian woman against physical and mental abuse at the hands of her husband and his brothers. Silvera and Gupta acknowledge the contributions of all who submitted material to the issue but pay special acknowledgement to the three anonymous entries: "We deeply admire the courage and dedication of those women who could not sign their names, but were determined to share their lives with us" ("Never Lost" 6–7). It is precisely these anonymous entries that embody the visionary potential of literacy (in Hunter's meaning of the word) as a tool to voice suppressed experiences and foster alliances.

In short, *Fireweed*'s "Women of Colour" issue draws upon a considerable array of experiences and articulations: activist and theoretical, creative and non-fictional, critical and proactive. The issue contributes to a growing body of material shaped by the "cultural, ideological, and moral direction" of highly educated women. It relies for content on women who have not had access to higher education but who continue to struggle to improve their circumstances despite the considerable persistence of dominant Canadian ideologies that maintain they are unworthy and should not expect more or better for themselves. They are taught, in fact, to remain silent about their struggles. As such, *Fireweed* 16 functions as a forum for literacy that, in printed form, models a cohesive community based upon participation and shared investment.

Identities ascribed and resisted

Writing in "'Who is she and what is she to you?': Mary Ann Shadd Cary and the (Im)possibility of Black/Canadian studies," Rinaldo Walcott criticizes Canadian Studies for what he refers to as a "wilful [sic] attempt to make a Black presence in Canada absent" (35). Brand's work propels acknowledgement of that presence, though, through the increase of foundational research material, with film, and with oral herstory. In independent and collaborative articles, she outlines a feminist-materialist framework within which she deconstructs the persistence of Black women's class proscriptions as one consequence of the ideological effects of racism and sexism as they determine the bounds of Black women's labour possibilities. In order to dismantle the common-sense notions of Black womanhood that maintain Black women in seemingly naturalized positions of wage labour, Brand's historical materialist model describes the prevailing socio-economic forces that have regulated the signifiers of Black women's class, race, gender, and sexuality in Canada.

Three articles authored by Brand evince a concentrated focus on the precise ideological construction of Black womanhood as it has evolved over time so as to maximize exploitability within a Canadian capitalist framework. This construction has shifted, loosely speaking, from the era of North American slavery to the period and location in which Brand writes in the mid and late 1980s. "A Working Paper on Black Women in Toronto: Gender, Race and Class" (1984), and her two-part essay "Black Women and Work: The Impact of Racially Constructed Gender Roles and the Sexual Division of Labour" (1987 and 1988, respectively), are distinct from other works examined in this chapter because they focus specifically on the conjunction of race and gender, which situate Black women in a class position that is unique to them and which takes as a constitutive element "Black women's work" ("Black Women" pt. one 35).

Brand's publication of these pieces is consistent with her endeavour to make visible the historical contingencies and socio-economic conditions that have remained largely un-investigated by Canadian social-science scholars, or in the less institutionally-determined areas of what she calls the "feminist project" ("Working" 26). The wholesale absence of narrative and herstorical records of Black women's experiences, the subject of previous chapters of this thesis, underpins a parallel omission in the study, analysis, and documentation of Black people's "migration, settlement and … labour force" participation in Canada, a defect that continues to suspend normalization of Black presence in this country. Moreover, the elision within socio-historical accounts, scholarship, and media coverage of the daily "struggles against racism" (26) undertaken by Blacks in Canada, implies a passive acceptance on the part of Blacks of disheartening circumstances that is, in fact, belied by ongoing resistance.

In "A Working Paper on Black Women in Toronto: Gender, Race and Class," Brand writes,

> This article is by way of beginning to look at how Black women's lives/sexuality are constructed in Canada: where our oppression is located, and how to focus on these locations in struggling/organising against oppression. What I hope to contribute in this working paper is analysis toward an organising tool which would have as its basis the recognition of who we are and what we live. (27)

The "organising tool" that Brand proposes takes as its central mechanisms "migration, labour, and gender, and … the construction of Black women's sexuality" (27). These elements determined Black women's arrival in North America, Brand maintains, and prefigure their contemporary presence.

Central to Brand's critique is the delineation of "a complex construction, encompassing racism and sexism," which has systematized Black women's experience in North America ("Working" 28). It was the ideological constructions of race, after all, that Europeans formulated in order to render the capture and enslavement of Blacks, and their transportation to the "New World," acceptable and profitable under colonialism and its attendant capitalist structures. Racism is not simply prejudice, however, just as experience is not simply unmediated knowledge. Instead, racism is dialectical: it functions as an economy of positive and negative stereotypes that confer upon or deny the value of groups of people. Racist currencies are derivative of hegemonic ideologies that require a cheap, disposable labour force to perform those jobs that the dominant classes refuse to take on.[5] Racist currencies are thus component parts of nation-narratives that either highlight or occlude contributions made by the nation's different peoples.

Within capitalism, in particular, racism's currencies are disseminated through the economy of "'common sense' notion[s] within the set of relations that comprise … everyday activity; [they are] part of the structures that prescribe the power relations and rewards in the workplace, …tool[s] that stratif[y] the exploitation of labour in the relations of production" ("Working" 28). As Joan W. Scott argues must be done with the analysis of experience, Brand's essays explain "the operations of the complex and changing discursive processes by which identities are ascribed, resisted, or embraced" (Scott 65); by deconstructing the subject positions that underlie common-sense racism, Brand illuminates the "discursive processes … [that] achieve their effect because they aren't noticed" (65). As Hazel Carby suggests, the intention of stereotypes, as with racism, is "not to reflect or represent a reality but to function as a disguise, or mystification, of objective social relations" (qtd. in Collins 68). The essays that this chapter examines are the building blocks of Brand's project to make visible and perceived the processes of exclusion, fragmentation, isolation, and suppression, so that they cannot continue to operate "unremarked."

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[5] The importation of Chinese men to construct the trans-Canada railway is but one example. "In 1885, the Federal Government enacted the Chinese Immigration Act … aimed at discouraging Chinese" immigration (*RHS* 50). Measures included the levelling of a head tax of fifty dollars, which subsequently rose in 1903 to $500. The Exclusion Act of 1923 "was introduced to prohibit all Chinese [immigration] except for students, merchants, children born in Canada, diplomats and persons in transit." Even Canadian-born Chinese could not sponsor for immigration purposes relatives born in China. The result: "Between 1924–1930 only three Chinese [immigrants] entered Canada."

Black women: non-feminine, sans family, a-sexual

Since the importation of slaves, which dictated the dehumanization of Black women to normalize their saleability, rape, and separation from their children, racism has functioned to differentiate Black from white women along axes of femininity and sexuality. One distinction made with respect to femininity—a category from which Black women's inclusion has been ideologically precluded—was the naturalization of Black women's labour in the fields and in agricultural production.[6] In contrast, the ideals of domesticity were stringently affixed to white middle- and upper-class women, who were enjoined to avoid all such physical labour. It was in this context that Black women's labour outside the home was normalized, and thus their performance of labour seemingly unsuitable to white women was established.

In part one of "Black Women and Work," Brand draws on scholarship by Madelaine MacDonald, who explores "changes in the ideological forms of masculinity and femininity"; she examines the economic conditions under which "elements of the two gain ascendancy in parallel to the needs of capital" (30).[7] The relevancy of this social dynamic is that ideological forms of masculinity and femininity are, in fact, not only gender-specific but also "race-specific" (31). Black women, like poor white women, are neither subject nor privy to the particular advantages or prerogatives of middle-class femininity;[8] in fact, the "'benefits' of 'natural refinement' never accrue" (32) to Black womanhood. Thus, even as white women are cyclically included or excluded from the work force, Black women effectively remain labourers within the confines of what has come to be perceived as "Black women's work" (35).[9] Brand contends that contemporary "Black women's work," as a result of migration to urban centres, has incorporated those occupations that "mirrored the jobs which [they] had once occupied, if not insofar as the payment of wages was concerned, at least insofar as the station or social class which those jobs obtained and [in] the low level of the wages" those jobs garner; in this way, "[a]nother layer was added to the old myth of inferiority and subservience in order to continue the economic exploitation of Black women" (35). The myth of inferiority serves to prop up racist-sexist "common-sense" perceptions of Black women to naturalize the work they have historically performed since emancipation. Ideology functions to hold them within service occupations and maintain their status as among the lowest paid workers in North America.[10]

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[6] For further reading, see the chapter "The Legacy of Slavery: Standards for a New Womanhood" in Angela Y. Davis's *Women, Race, and Class* (New York: Random House, 1981), 5–12.

[7] Brand explains the dynamic between white and Black women's femininity, detailed by MacDonald, in the following way: "[W]hen capital demands a cheap and numerous labour force, the definition of femininity which gains ascendancy is that of the capable woman—good at detailed or boring work. When the demands for labour are not as high, however, the definition of femininity which gains ascendancy is that of the ultra-feminine, helpless female" ("Black Women" pt. one 30–31).

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[8] Class, too, is an integral part of the matrix of race and sex, since poor white women were also without the financial means to distance themselves from physical agricultural or domestic labour.

[9] Consider Jacqueline Jones's observation in Chapter 2, for example, about the loss, by 1948, of wartime gains made by Blacks during the Second World War.

[10] Writing in "A Working Paper" (1984), and citing a 1981 study by Reitz et al entitled *Ethnic Inequality and Segregation in Jobs*, Brand makes specific the economic consequences of the ongoing servitude required of Black women in Toronto:

> A look at the economic condition of Black women reveals that in 1979, the mean income of Black women was $8,000 as compared to that of white males' $16,600. Black women and Italian women (the latter averaging $8,500) were the lowest paid in the metro Toronto labour force (Reitz et al). The mean income for white women was $14,000.
>
> We can deduce from current wages, and from the segregated occupations where Black women are still to be found, that the present mean income of Black women is an estimated $11,500. Consider that Black women may have to

Brand argues that the centrality to Black women of waged labour outside the home contrasts with the constructed subjectivity of the white middle-class woman who remains at home to care for her children. The distinction contributes to Black women's portrayal as non-feminine and therefore as something less than human. "Contrary to the theory that women can be defined primarily by their work in the home, that this is the main function of women in late capitalism," deduces Brand, "the historically repeated use of Black women's labour outside the home shows that production under capitalism *presupposes* an exploitable workforce" ("Working" 34). Given that Black women often head single-parent households, the outside employment necessary to their survival distances them from direct involvement in the daily care of their own children and thus removes them further from the construct of white motherhood, which is home-based.

Canadian regulations that manage immigration from the Caribbean have sought to control familial and sexual aspects of Black women's lives. To qualify for the Domestic Workers Scheme, for example, Silvera indicates "applicants had to be between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five, single, with at least a grade eight education, and be able to pass a medical examination" (Introduction 7). "'Single,'" Brand clarifies, "meant no dependents, no man, and no sex" ("Working" 33). The obligatory absence of children and/or male partners implies and requires abstention from, or at least the indefinite postponement of, sexuality while working in Canada. In this framework that denies

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support, on average, two or three children on this income and the dire economic straits in which they live will become clear.

The Reitz study also goes on to note that job security is lowest among Portuguese and Black women, (again, "Black" by inference, since their term is "West Indian") though Black women had a mean educational level of 11.7 years. (34)

Black women the right to family, they are recognized and valued for little more than the sum of the work they perform. The ideological construct of Black womanhood as asexual, suggests Brand, assures that "Black women remain at all times a source of ready, constant, ill-paid and degraded labour" ("Black Women" pt. two 90).[11] The heavy predominance of female immigration in the 1970s corresponds to the gender-bound nature of work performed by Blacks and is linked to concepts of Black women as controllable, strong, and compliant.[12]

The projection of Black women as capable workers who will perform work found undesirable by economic classes able to refuse it reflects the actual conditions of their employment in Canada. Often, regulations that determine their employability are acutely influenced by institutional disinterest in, and disdain for, women as individuals with inherent rights to family and sexuality. Brand points, as an example, to the threat of the Canadian federal government in 1978 to deport ten Jamaican women resident in Canada through the Domestic Workers Scheme. The women, sensitive to the intimations of Jamaican and Canadian government officials that the probability of acceptance into the programme would improve if they did not declare their existing children, refrained from doing so. Despite living in Canada for anywhere from five to ten years, deportation was threatened because these women now wanted their undeclared children to join them.[13] Brand describes this example as "one of the most publicised cases of the state's position on Black women. It shows," she argues, "that the state has no use for Black women outside of their function as cheap labour. That the state did not apply this rule to Black men, who just as surely had children back home whom they did not declare, reveals this case as the outcome of racist-sexist policy" ("Working" 39). Brand elaborates on white Canada's blinkered perception of the sum of Black women's potential when she writes: "Canadian immigration policy, which demanded that domestic workers coming from the Caribbean on work permits have no encumbrances (children) or appendages, indicates the ideological form of Black femininity accepted and recognised by the Canadian state" ("Black Women and Work" pt. two 91). That this incident occurred at a time of economic downturn, when the rhetoric of retaining Canadian jobs for Canadians (read white citizens) was rampant, underscores the state's pragmatic utilization of Black women as disposable, replaceable labourers, and as individuals worthy of only minimal human rights.

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[11] Evidence of Canada's myopic perception of Black women in terms of the labour that can be extracted from them is evident in the official move away from the original terms of the Domestic Workers Scheme. Workers were initially eligible for landed immigrant status after completion of one year's indentured servitude. The shift to a "permit system … brought restrictions on the terms and conditions of Canadian residence; the intent of the new policy was to keep women in those domestic jobs," writes Brand ("Working" 33). The Temporary Employment Visas that replaced the original system specified the particular kinds of employment in which an individual could engage. The change was made by the Canadian Immigration and Employment Commission, which considered it necessary to stem the exodus of workers from domestic labour positions into nursing and clerical jobs that women sought after upgrading skills through enrolment in night-school classes and other training. Immigration policy again altered in 1981: domestic workers who had resided in Canada for two or more years were eligible to apply for permanent resident status (for further reading, see Silvera's "Introduction," 10–12).

[12] A study conducted by Juliet Christianson et al reveals that in 1979 the ratio of female to male Canada-bound immigrants from the Caribbean was 1.8 to 1 ("Working" 33).

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[13] Paradoxically, employers of Black women eager to exploit their labour often couch appeals for extra labour in language imbued with family alliances. Brand writes:

> It is a well-known joke among Black women in domestic work and institutionalised domestic work and other areas of Black women's work that employers, when trying to exact more work from them or when Black women reject disrespectful treatment or assert themselves, make an appeal to family. "But we treat her like part of the family" or "You know that you're part of the family" or "We are a family here" are some of the statements made. The derision with which Black women view these statements is a recognition of the attempts to "work them to the bone" while extracting that "free" (read unpaid) labour which stands for kinship, blood relations and familial duty. ("Black women and Work" pt. two, 88–89)

Presenting models of resistance

Consistent with her agenda to catalogue resistance to inequities constitutive of Black womanhood in Canada, "A Working Paper" and both segments of "Black Women and Work" are peppered with accounts of the opposition Black women have mobilized against oppressive conditions. "A Working Paper" affirms the Black family and extended family as an essentially matrilineal network, the focus of which has been, and is, the provision of a supportive foundation for its children. Brand, with an observation made by Hazel Carby, stresses the proactive potential of the family to fight back:

> We would not wish to deny that the family can be a source of oppression for us, but we also wish to examine how the black family has functioned as a prime source of resistance to oppression. We need to recognize that during slavery, periods of colonialism and under the present authoritarian state, the black family has been a site of political and cultural resistance to racism. (qtd. in "Working" 36)

Part one of "Black Women and Work" integrates accounts of Black social historians who describe personal and collective spontaneous and organized acts of resistance to conditions that range from personal physical mistreatment to the widespread exploitation of Black agricultural labourers in Louisiana; it glosses, too, attempts made to unionize

New York's one million Black domestics in the 1930s.[14] Part two describes, in brief, the triumph of a Toronto union over a proposal by Metro Toronto to convert full-time nursing positions to part-time hours, a transition that would have jeopardized the job-security and income of its predominantly female, Black, and immigrant membership. While Brand directs her critique at the matrix of socio-economic dynamics that sustain Black women's disadvantaged class and social positions, she is loath to relegate to the background, or to happenstance, evidence of resistance and revolt that forms an essential, creditable element of Black women's heritage in North America.

A component of Brand's effort to expose hegemonic manifestations of racism and sexism, of patriarchy and class, is her commitment to expose the role played by advanced capitalism in engineering and obfuscating social alliances: either productively, for the purpose of sustaining pro-capital relations of production, or injuriously, against the working-classes that make capitalism feasible. As an example of ongoing efforts to cloak the intrinsic political affiliations of classes with parallel interests, Brand draws attention to the shared needs of poor women, white and Black:

> In a present day example [1988], the media as well as the state in Canada and the U.S. decry Black mothers on mothers' allowances as being lazy while they suggest that (white) women do not need daycare, that they should stay home with their children and preserve family life. Despite a similar reality in white working-

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[14] The social historians and the works that Brand cites include Angela Y. Davis's *Women, Race and Class* (New York: Random House, 1981), Dorothy Sterling's *We Are Your Sisters* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1983), and Jacqueline Jones's *Labour of Love, Labour of Sorrow: Black Women, Work and Family, From Slavery to the Present* (New York: Random House, 1985).

> class women's lives, racism repeatedly obscures class alliances. ("Black Women" pt. two 91)

Capitalism, Brand stresses, is not called to account for the inequitable distribution of the world's wealth "as a solution to poverty" ("Working" 39), nor, for that matter, is capitalism identified as invested in the maintenance of that discrepancy. Evidence of the inequitable treatment of the poor, and confirmation of the disparate opportunities available to the poor and the wealthy of third and first world nations alike, is manifest in the discrepant practices designed to contain, control, or enable women's sexuality. "The testing of contraceptives in Latin America, the use of depoprovera on non-white women, the sterilisation of Black women in the southern United States and in the U.S. colony of Puerto Rico," Brand professes, contrasts diametrically with "the scientific experimentation with in vitro conception, frozen sperm banks, surrogate motherhood, cloning, [and] genius sperm banks" in the developed world ("Working" 39). Such division reflects North American capitalism's commitment to the welfare of white North Americans and to the provision of an immigrant workforce of colour, sans family attachment or a social network to provide support and community.

(Dis)entangling the state: defining "free speech" and the "visible minority"

Two articles co-authored by Brand in the mid and late 1980s examine the mechanics of state intervention intended to dissipate and divert organization around social concerns of value to suppressed and marginalized populations. The articles focus on the state and its investments in reproducing the conditions necessary for the maintenance of capitalism, and sustaining the middle-class. Written three years apart, the two articles are separated by a profound discrepancy in the soundness of their logical and deconstructive apparatus as they outline complex patterns of state intervention that shape popular and political discourses about free speech and the rights and concerns of women of colour.

"The Production of Free Speech is the Production of Consent in the Management of Culture" (1985) is co-written with Sri Bhaggiyadatta, with whom Brand would co-author *Rivers Have Sources* the following year. The article suffers from an undermining lack of specificity: the authors enlist terminology that homogenizes and essentializes the aims of advanced capitalist countries (dubbed ACCs) that in no way accounts for individual variability among states. The defining features the authors attribute to first world status—unthinking economic supremacy, and the unchallenged control and manipulation of information and its dissemination—tend to clot into a supernatural spectre of undifferentiated nations. On the positive side, Brand and Sri Bhaggiyadatta produce a reasonable account of the roles that capitalism and the state play in the censorship of information about the real relations of production between ACCs and third world countries; they also address the suppression of information about the concerns and conditions of the poor and working class within ACCs.

Brand and Sri Bhaggiyadatta focus on the concept of freedom of speech as one that is employed to divert attention from the relations of production between ACCs and third world nations, and to mollify hostility toward and resistance against exploitative conditions at home. Capitalism, they suggest, functions to silence internal and extra-national opposition by fabricating false confidence in the efficacy, accessibility, and thoroughly representative capacity of free speech. Within the structure of the state, capitalism manages the existing network of "common sense … racist/sexist ideologies, received wisdoms, compulsions of labour and the sheer vulgar logic (power) of present socio-economic conditions" and binds it to the social inertia of the status quo in order to legitimate the relations of production of workers to their labour, even as those relations are obscured ("Production" 15). The two write:

> Free speech then is not the external, objective eye of the society nor the tool for change which it poses as, but is itself one of the products of this mode. *It is significant of capitalism, not critical of it nor an aberration within it.* Rather, the crucible of free speech, just as the schools, factories and fields in this society, is a location of the extraction of surplus value. The debates produced within it, their influences, their arguments and their outcomes are no more than so many garments manufactured, so much forest chopped down in the interests of accumulation of capital. (emphasis added, 18)

Brand and Sri Bhaggiyadatta propose that the state actually stifles meaningful free speech by fabricating a false public confidence in its even application and efficacy in society at large: free speech is touted as an essential expressive outlet within an allegedly liberal, democratic political system, one purported to esteem the contributions of its citizens. As a regulator of cathartic release, it is essential within a capitalist democracy that "the airing of people's views must be *believed* to occur" (my emphasis, 18); however, it is the nature of this socio-economic system, capitalism, that the voices of those fundamentally opposed to it and critical of it are effectively omitted from public forms of articulation, except where that expression is self-generated and -financed.

By definition, but not unswervingly, the well-being of an ACC's government is tied (for the sake of its own survival) to the interests of the nation's dominant economic class. Goran Therborn posits, "When we say that a class holds state power, we mean that what is done through the state positively acts upon the (re-)production of the mode of production of which the class in question is the dominant class" (qtd. in Carty and Brand 39). The state is not without relative autonomy in its legislation of capitalist structures: it has the ability to ratify laws that govern working conditions and wages, the collection of taxes, and the distribution of subsidies, for example. Nonetheless, the state represents the industries of the dominant class and cannot, simultaneously, "work for the benefit of the working class because there are substantive differences in the interests of both classes and the two are always in conflict" (39). As I have argued in this chapter, capitalism relies upon, generates, and exploits racist and sexist divisions among working-class populations in order to supply a work force in need of employment on terms beneficial to capitalism. Consequently, state-funded and -managed initiatives and organizations that operate in public and private social and economic contexts, ostensibly in opposition to racism and sexism, do not work exclusively in the interests of the working class. To do so would amount to the state working against itself, insofar as any state organizations' interests, regardless of their autonomy, are aligned to a degree with those of government and thereby capitalist forces.

It cannot be assumed, for example, that women appointed by the Canadian and Ontario governments to connect with grassroots women's organizations, and to coordinate NOIVMW and OCVMW, share either educational, racial, or class histories with working-class women of colour; neither can it be assumed that they share similar objectives with respect to altering dominant governing and economic systems. If, in fact, some elements of education, class, and race positioning are common to both groups, it is nevertheless likely that political and economic structures are perceived differently by virtue of distinct economic and power situations that necessarily inform the various parties. Carty and Brand frame the imbedded conflict this way: "we cannot assume that there is collusion between the petit bourgeoisie and the state but any conflict which exists is mediated or negotiated through the ideological liberal-democratic processes which legitimate advanced capitalism" (40). It is logical then, although difficult to detect perhaps, that government employees and advisors could well misinterpret or misrepresent the concerns of working-class women for whom the perpetuation of the state represents ongoing struggles against racism and sexism.

Carty and Brand point in their article to the signifier that lies at the heart of both NOIVMW and OCVMW but which is itself devoid of substance: that is, the notion of a "visible minority" (39). They astutely observe that "the term is void of any race or class recognition and, more importantly, of class struggle or struggle against racism. It is therefore ahistorical and serves to reduce to meaninglessness the specific parts it purports to elevate" (39). The designation nevertheless served a practical purpose for the Ontario government when it sought to organize the conference that spawned the OCVMW: the conference would include all non-white women's groups but would exclude, at the state's discretion, so-called "immigrant" women—white Latin American women, specifically—who could not be considered, it would seem, "visible minorities."

Erected by the State, this bureaucratic barrier to collectivized efforts and generative political engagement, represents but one of several spanners thrown amongst the cogs of what was otherwise a productive political affiliation of women. That the State saw fit to confound cooperation occurring among those organizing against its interests is not in the least surprising, as Gramsci notes in his comments about the progressive and regressive practices of political parties. In this vein, Gramsci remarks on the policing function of a political party:

> It is progressive when it tends to keep the dispossessed reactionary forces within the bounds of legality, and to raise the backward masses to the level of the new legality. It is regressive when it tends to hold back the vital forces of history and to maintain a legality which has been superseded, which is anti-historical, which has become extrinsic. Besides, the way in which the party functions provides discriminating criteria. When the party is progressive it functions "democratically" (democratic centralism); when the party is regressive it functions "bureaucratically" (bureaucratic centralism). The party in this second case is a simple, unthinking executor. It is then technically a policing organism, and its name of "political party" is simply a metaphor of a mythological character. (*Prison* 155)

The efforts of federal and provincial governments to contain the collaborative efforts of women's groups, by means of cultivating divisions where none existed previously and by generating bureaucratic impedimenta, are examples of bureaucratic centralism brought to bear against progressive forces within the population. The Gordian knot of the "visible minority" issue was particularly disruptive.

The effects of the exclusions were multiple. First, the exclusion of one constituency worked to divide one population of women from another, and thus fragmented and diffused some of the collective pressure mounting against the state that had initially spawned the OCVMW. Second, the practical organization of the conference served to channel and divert the oppositional and organizational momentum of grassroots women's associations, the principle agenda of which was to alter, fundamentally, the (re)production of the relations of production of the capitalist structure. "All specific issues were subsumed and women were actually consumed with state-generated conflicts," write Carty and Brand, "the major one being ...the question of who are 'visible minority' [sic]; or whether the question of accent was important enough to determine minority status" (40). In this way, state-generated conflicts—issues that had not previously been points of contention—sapped the already limited energy, time, and resources of volunteer women's groups. Third, coordination of the conference around "visible minority" women displaced the particularist but nonetheless related agendas of women's groups that had already begun to share "strategies and models for working *across* communities" (emphasis added, 40). The women now needed to modify and generalize their agendas in order to represent a much larger and more diversified population. Because the practical experience of the smaller groups was potentially destabilizing, the province engaged those groups in a process of forming a broadly inclusive coalition, managing in this way to contain organized oppositional constituencies within specific populations. When they had operated as smaller groups, the "crucial aspect of their work was challenging the state in different contexts such as equal education, equal employment and fair immigration policy, and at the core of their analysis was the class conflict" (40). Periodically, state-supported policies, because of their inherent alliance with capitalism, tended to promote the very sexism and racism at the core of oppositional feminist agendas. Carty and Brand contend, "the chosen response of the state to these women's concerns is reflective of how it deflects the genuine concerns with interests which conflict with its own into forms that it finds manageable and adaptable to its own agenda" (40). In the organization of the OCVMW, the province found a means to contain forces of resistance and to diffuse attention that would otherwise be directed at the state.

The support of the Ontario government, for what would become the OCVMW-generating conference, represented a positive, seductive development for some. Others were able to withstand the glamour of provincial involvement: they were cognizant of the fundamental contradictions that state support and management represented to the processes of forming coalitions and formulating agendas. The outcome was that some groups withdrew their participation and support from the conference, further fracturing the interests and resources of all groups. Carty and Brand point out that analysis of the province's integral involvement in the conference "reveals that what actually happened was that the state's goals conflicted with and caused a reformulation of the issues" (41), issues that women's groups had already identified as essential. The state's finishing move, to quash the conference's momentum, was to withhold the financial and material resources necessary to implement the many proposals the conference generated. The authors testify that "while the state did not provide the Coalition with funding it nevertheless in effect assigned to the organization the burden of all the problems of all women whom it considered to be in the category 'visible minority'" (41). The commitment made by many women to sustain the OCVMW as an oppositional organization had the effect of siphoning yet more energy from direct challenges to racism and sexism effectively underwritten by the state.

"that which we seek to explain, that about which knowledge is produced"

The ongoing success of advanced capitalism is due, in part, to its capacity to co-opt the organization of resistance and opposition movements. Capitalism divides by means of managing the fragmentation of tactical alliances. Capitalism's agents, in the form of the state, unions, and advantaged classes, mobilize common-sense racism while they appeal to the class-based interests of the various feminist and labour movements. By appealing to the specialized interests of constituencies, derived from the moderate and disparate privileges they enjoy, relatively stable allegiances to the material systems that provide those privileges is promoted. Ultimately, an analytical framework that has the potential to alter the prevailing feminist critiques of gender, race, and class relations must stress the interdependence of class location and gender constructions. For Brand, this focus and emphasis is necessary for the development of an inclusive feminist praxis:

> A feminism relevant to Black women would, therefore, hold much for radicalising what is called "the movement" and the body of work emanating from it, since such a feminism would confront race, class and sex as these converge in the dominant ideology. A feminism arising from a confrontation with the dominant ideology is necessarily class conscious since the conditions under which we live and have lived ever since coming to the "New World" have been wrought by capitalist relations of production, and since the true emancipation of Black women would have to consider capitalist exploitation as anathema to the very lives of

> Black women and their struggle to liberate themselves. ("Black Women" pt. one 30)

The analysis of the characteristics of current divisions along lines of race and class, their mechanisms derivative conflicts, is at the centre of most of Brand's collaborative articles.

The substance of the work of the Fireweed Guest Collective, of Brand, Carty, and Sri Bhaggiyadatta, is therefore twofold: first, it performs an analysis of the ideological and material foundations upon which the framework of subordination and exploitation of women of colour is built; and second, by way of feminist-materialist deconstruction, the work promotes public comprehension of the systemic nature of that manipulation. The essays and articles discussed in this chapter, in keeping with Brand's other work on the complex matrix of issues that affect Black women, make available the hard-won wisdom and analytical framework compelled by the destructive encounters of Black women and women of colour with the capitalist state. Specifically, this small body of material uncovers state strategies to contain oppositional agendas and the practices that weaken or divert successful alliances forged by women's groups to resist state-facilitated racism and sexism.

Constitutive of Brand's role as an organic intellectual is the appraisal and critique of the hegemonic machinery, political and economic, which oppresses and exploits the labour of the working class. The collaborative nature of much of her prose work provides an effective model of the kind of partnerships necessitated by the unequal distribution of power and resources within Canadian society. Brand's ability to articulate a broad understanding of the overall mechanisms of domination, their specific and divisive manipulations, combines with her commitment to enable the expression of others normally prevented from contributing. The practical result of Brand's work is the articulation of social critique and the dissemination of the sophisticated analytical framework necessary to apply that critique in the Canadian context.

Chapter 4

Reading Fiction's Departures: Opposition and Black-centred Discourse

> If reading is produced as a discipline to be learned and a technology of the self, it is therefore not because reading has the oppositional power to produce deflections of desire and hence changes in the production of the real; it is because there is a total system that must include reading, and its consequences, as a condition of the production of power.
>
> ~ Ross Chambers, "Conclusion: Room for Maneuver"

> I begin from the small assumption that it is possible to leap, and that I am curious. The novel doesn't only have to come to me, I need to go to it too. I have to go to the text and I have to say, I'm going to learn some things here.
>
> ~ Dionne Brand, "At the Full and Change of CanLit"

Fiction poses one of the most problematic challenges to an assertion central to this dissertation—that each genre Brand engages has a functional role to play in formulating and advancing the organic intellectual project of critical self-consciousness. Unlike documentary, which endeavours to frame and represent to the viewer (in a subjective and specific manner) "*the* world," fiction, because mimetic, does not summon a reader to take up the role of historical or active agent in response to the particularities of events or circumstance a fiction represented. Unlike oral herstories, literary narratives (because fictional) do not make claims to stand in objectively for individually lived experience. Moreover, distinct from the analytical essays that scrutinize hegemony's structural and ideological scaffolding in its concrete forms, Brand's story-bound communities do not abide by objective, quantifiable standards. Like her work in other genres, however, Brand's fiction does seek to purposefully represent a typicality of experience reflective of the conditions of a subaltern class, one marked by economic and labour exploitation, and

Though ACCs and the dominant classes laud free speech as an inalienable component of public discourse, of social and civic formation, an often unspoken taboo surrounds the articulation of axiomatic opposition to hegemonic structures. Consequently, the nature and extent of the public debate that does occur around fundamental issues is restricted to the expression of likeminded dialogue, Brand and Sri Bhaggiyadatta assert, rather than authentically antagonistic and challenging interchange:

> In normal human activity—speech is related to intention, information towards a decision. What [the] abstraction of free speech provides is a place where the presence of debate is in and of itself an end. The impression that "debating" gives is that society can obtain its opposite; is larger than its opposite even to the point of negating the existence of opposites. (17)

For example, what is striking in the political realm is not the dissimilarity of views held by ostensibly distinct parties, but the very scarcity of disparate standpoints. Probing and articulate opposition is implicitly and explicitly unwelcome.[15] The current fear of open debate about the merit of the U.S. War on Terrorism provides a contemporary example of the methodically managed and contained nature of free speech.

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[15] As I write this I am reminded of an experience I had as a high-school student in San Diego, CA, and member of the KEY (Kiwanis Educate Youth) Club service group. Appearing at a national KEY Club conference in the fall of 1984, a "Russian" man was introduced as the evening's keynote speaker. In English wrought with a thick Russian accent, he proceeded to vent criticism of the disparity between rich and poor in America, the inadequacy of public health care, the high rates of homicide made possible by the constitutionally protected freedom to bear arms, and similar denunciations. Though his language was undeniably inflammatory, his position, from an objective standpoint, was persuasive and was, for myself at least, worthy of consideration. The atmosphere in the hall congealed with tension and anger as young Americans bristled under the heavy barrage of verbiage. As audible opposition began to break forth from the crowd, the man's accent swiftly transformed itself into an American drawl. He now introduced himself as an American—and proud of it—and a former member of the armed forces. He was, it turned out, an "inspirational speaker" who traveled the country to perform as he had just done. He went on to praise the United States as "the greatest country in the world" and one for which he "thanked God" every morning. Predictably, the applause in

Perhaps it is Sri Bhaggiyadatta and Brand's contempt for the substance of the debates that ostensibly represent ideological opposition that leads them to adopt the hyperbolic and inflammatory language that suffuses "The Production of Free Speech." Though the article articulates of a creditable historical-materialist analysis, its tone is one of bombastic, hyper anti-capitalism and it resonates with the sloganism of anti-imperialist conspiracy. The fervent pitch of the editorial's language engages a linguistic register that plainly locates the piece at a discursive and ideological remove from the barren, innocuous class of conventional debate, and the dominant constructions of free speech, that the authors spurn. Certainly, the passion of the authors for their topic is unmistakable, and it translates into a palpable sense of political urgency and volatile tension that propel the reader through the text.

As such a reader, I am nonetheless aware of a surprising sense of resistance that the article's tone triggers in me—this, despite a strong alliance with Brand and Sri Bhaggiyadatta's political perspective and objectives. Perhaps the article challenges my own sense of what constitutes "'saying' it right"; my attention is diverted from the specific mechanics of the processes the authors describe by the rhetorical hyperbole of conspiracy and outrage. I am irritated by what strike me as careless grammatical and

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the auditorium rose to fever pitch. The rhetoric and clichés he deployed to win over the mob that only minutes before appeared set to string him up was as euphuistic and praiseful as his critique had been vitriolic and blunt. Paradoxically, his adulation lacked either the substance or logic of his previous critique. It relied entirely upon the excited emotions of the audience. The inescapable irony of the crowd's instantaneous transport from palpable anger to orgasmic ideological rapture was too much. I had to leave the room.

punctuation errors, by sentence fragments (16, 19). These responses are in keeping with the productive challenge the article represents to my sensibilities around rhetorical correctness and the level tone with which debate "should" occur—sensibilities that the article reminds me need to be considered anew.

A second form of censorship identified by Sri Bhaggiyadatta and Brand is the discursive manufacture by the state of a specious dichotomy and disconnect between developed and developing nations based upon "evolutionary paradigms of development" (17). This is to say, a dichotomous model of a civilized-democratic-rational first world and a totalitarian-communist-barbarous third world is elaborated by ACCs, via mass media and collaborative news agencies, to block first world peoples' understanding of their dependence for prosperity upon the exploitation of third world labour and resources.

Advanced capitalist countries, the two charge, resort to the selective representation of decontextualized events in the third world—with a focus on violent occurrences—as illustrative of a lack of civilization; in this way, they construct piecemeal an ideological, common-sense understanding that "legitimate[s] [the] right of ACCs to take action against the third world" (16). What remains obscured by "[i]mages of people in the third world … robbed of context … [is] the relation of their exploitation to that which exists here" in the first world. Moreover, first world media fail to "mention that the third world is its source for cheap labour and cheap materials, but rather, using a patronizing and patriarchal mode of discourse, shows the third world as dependent on aid and a necessary burden of the ACC's" (17). The deflective nature of media representation occludes the connection between third world poverty and correlative political instability—the by-products of imperialism. The comparative wealth obtained by first world nations serves to offset the urgency of economic and political concerns as they are experienced at home, within the state. Such analytical disconnect is feasible, Sri Bhaggiyadatta and Brand posit, "because capitalism is not merely an economic system[:] it is an educative process, a *culture*, engaged in winning consent" (18). Like any mechanism inherent in national formation, economic and political interests exert a measure of control over the content of what is taught while they simultaneously preside over which debates are allowed to emerge. Thus, a system of regulated "free speech" restricts the range of information available to the public; it also curtails the expression of fundamental opposition.

As is evident in *Rivers Have Sources*, the suppression of intra-national experiences of poor and subaltern populations is perpetuated by the absence of media coverage; homogenizing national myths of origin and development neglect to represent equally the contributions of all parties and serve to justify certain groups' exclusion from the nation's wealth. It is against and within the selectively constructed history of the nation that Brand, Sri Bhaggiyadatta, and others work to interpose the voices of those omitted from that text—to challenge the omissions of, and thereby alter at their core, national narratives. Unfortunately, "having a voice, expressing oneself, is not sufficient to change the compelling course of the state" (*RHS* 18). One engine of this inadequacy is the state's capacity to divert attention and debate away from issues that have truly revolutionary potential and to re-channel or stifle oppositional forces. These practices are the subjects of "'Visible Minority' Women: A Creation of the Canadian State," Linda Carty and Brand's joint article of 1988.

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In "The Production of Free Speech," Brand and Sri Bhaggiyadatta advise those who work in opposition to the state "to look at not only who chooses the debate and issues but also their location within the social formation" (18). Linda Carty and Brand's "'Visible Minority' Women: A Creation of the Canadian State" (1988) is an instructive and persuasive article that examines just this subject. It presents a lucid analysis of the mechanics, motivations, and contradictions of the Canadian state's sanction and intervention in the development in 1986 of the National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women (NOIVMW) and the Ontario Coalition of Visible Minority Women (OCVMW) in 1987. Carty and Brand deconstruct impediments to the improvement of social and economic conditions for women of colour that are generated by what appear, outwardly, as proactive efforts by the Canadian state. In contrast with Brand and Sri Bhaggiyadatta, the authors of this piece go to great lengths to minimize formulaic representations of the state as inseparable from and subservient to capitalist imperatives; instead, they present a nuanced reading of the state's inevitable investment in its own continuation.

Two areas of concern lie at the heart of "'Visible Minority' Women": the first is the contradictory, counterproductive nature of the state's participation in the support of working-class movements that aim to arrest (and terminate where possible) exploitation of workers by advanced capitalist forces. The article's second concern is to demonstrate how state intervention in grassroots anti-capitalist organizations can effectively derail them by fomenting internal division, and by diverting productive energies away from initial grassroots objectives and toward the fulfillment of principally bureaucratic obligations. Thus, again, in the lyrics of Faith Nolan, does hegemony "divide and rule."

essentializing identity markers. This project provides the foundation for the articulation of counterhegemonic fictional worlds and real-world accounts of Blackness.

The *counterhegemonic* nature of so-called *fiction worlds*, I propose, is really an amalgamation of several elements. At a fundamental level, what constitutes a counterhegemonic fiction can simply be the particular narrative a fiction communicates. Frederic Jameson reasons, "[g]enres … are essentially literary institutions, or social contracts between a writer and a specific public, whose function is to specify the proper use of a particular cultural artifact [sic]" (106). Keeping Jameson's definition in mind, a counterhegemonic narrative can simply be that which, through storylines, locations, and characters, sets the reader off her guard. In the parlance of Victor Shklovsky, this process is one of de-automatization. "The technique of art is to make objects 'unfamiliar,'" Shklovsky contends, "to make forms difficult, to increase the difficulty and length of perception because the process of perception is an aesthetic end in itself and must be prolonged" (49). While the defamiliarizing process of art often functions at the levels of form and language, and thus "removes objects from the automatism of perception," Brand's fictions actually defamiliarize fiction by locating Blacks at the centre of their discourse. Writing Blacks into the historical record, even a fictional one, removes her fictions some distance from the realm of the North American literary hegemonic. As I will discuss a little further on in this chapter, Brand's complex portrayal of Black protagonists also positions her fiction beyond the bounds of the North American norm. Of course, the obvious ideological bent of Brand's work similarly renders her fictions counterhegemonic.

Brand's counterhegemonic fictional worlds open up space for communities made either invisible or coarse by mainstream media. Brand explains: "What we try to do inside of those contexts"—contexts of colonial education, racism, and misogyny, but also in the realm of mass media's generic standardization—"is to take ourselves back—at a deeply poetic level, to love ourselves back into existence…. grafting ourselves back, and loving ourselves into a presence" (Wanyeki et al. 20). Coming from one other than Brand—so earnest and conscientious in her cultivation of a healthy sense of self, the historicizing of Black context, and her recognition of Black women's contributions to the conservation of Black culture—this language of "loving ourselves into a presence" could well be dismissed as saccharine or merely naïve, a Pollyanna utterance in the face of elision. Brand engages her projects with a characteristic solemnity and integrity, however, which leaves little room to question her investment in the practical consequence of her work.

As might be anticipated, the demands and pragmatics of representing Blacks in literature are varied. Speaking with Tihanyi, Brand affixes self-recognition and cultural representation to the plane of language itself, to dialect, and to sound:

> When I was thirteen, the English teacher, after having taught us Dickens, read [Sam] Selvon. And we broke up. We were joyous. It was so wonderful, so familiar because it sounded like us. The literature we were schooled in we didn't find all that horrible. We loved it too. If you were like me and you loved language, then you just loved how things sounded. And you wished you were in them. (8)

Dale Carnegie posits, "a person's name is to that person the sweetest and most important sound in any language" (105). While a measure of truth bolsters Carnegie's affirmation, it is difficult to imagine, without experiencing it, how much more intimately nourishing it is to hear read—for the first time—the lingua franca of one's locus, the language implicated in and inseparable from location and detailed, quotidian pleasures:[4] the subjectivity of cultural geography. By "subjectivity of cultural geography" I mean to suggest that, like language, cultural practices are bound up in an intimate network of interpersonal affiliations, the manners of speaking and address, and, to an indeterminate degree, the associations of physical sensations that one carries within and which shade memory and imagination.[5]

One cannot disregard the capacity of language to re-inscribe dominant threads of discourse unless language is used deliberately to articulate and represent a novel perception of the world at large, and human relations specifically. Luce Irigaray insists, "[i]f we keep on speaking the same language together, we're going to reproduce the same history. Begin the same old stories all over again..... If we keep on speaking sameness, if we speak to each other as men have been doing for centuries, as we have been taught to speak, we'll miss each other, fail ourselves" (205). While Irigaray speaks primarily to the disparity between phallocentric discourse and gynocentric discourse, the relevance of her observation to the contest between the poles of racially dominant and oppositional discourse is useful to extrapolate.

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[4] The conception of "locus" I draw on for this discussion was articulated first by American poet Charles Olson in his influential essay "Projective Verse" (1959). The concept, which emphasizes the potential (and sometimes cultivated) impact of the geographical, cultural, and linguistic environment upon the poet, was embraced by the TISH poets, instigators of *TISH*, a "small mag," initially mimeographed in and distributed from the basement of then-UBC-professor Warren Tallman. Poets Frank Davey, George Bowering, James Reid, Frederic Wah, David Dawson, and Lionel Kearns were primarily responsible for editing the nineteen initial instalments of *TISH* (1961–1962).

[5] The opening pages of Brand's essay "Just Rain Bacolet" (*BOS*) 3–5 are suggestive, for example, of a subjective cultural geography that links social and geographical elements.

While figurative representation in the form of fictional characters can, of course, be compelling, literature as a vital linguistic performance is fundamentally a discursive interaction involving the internal ear of the reader with the text—ideologically mediated as that intersection inevitably is. For Brand, endowed with a poet's meticulous ear for language, hearing Selvon read aloud must have proved a revelation of language's potential to represent.

Pragmatics: centring Black narratives

Surpassing even the immediate appeal and affirmation of home-language, Brand informs Beverly Daurio, "People need their lives to be elucidated, spoken about" ("Writing It" 32). The demand becomes more crucial where dominant discourse either dismisses or fails to acknowledge essential human worth and equity, when Blacks are "awfully misrepresented, stereotyped, so flat and thin, and always at the service of white characters" (32). Brand's cognizance of this requisite elucidation began to crystallize in the scholastic framework of Trinidad's British school system's colonizing literature, where purposeful misrepresentation sought "to take a hold of those [colonized] people's minds and turn them against themselves" (Wanyeki et al. 20). Brand outlines the elements requisite for the repudiation of essentialist and destructive portrayals when she remarks, "I want to write, film, talk about us as the subjects of our own lives, as the speakers in our own discourses, as the centre of things" (20). If disseminated in the Trinidad of Brand's childhood, Black-centred discourse would certainly have helped to counter the displacement of Blacks from a British-centred curriculum, as well as defied the colonial presumption of Trinidad's significance as merely derivative of its association with England, an assumption that was already facing challengers in the late 1960s.

Preceding her move to Canada, Brand's drive to develop a new, affirmative Black-centred discourse was nurtured by the presence in Trinidad of the Black Power movement and the Trinidad Black Panther party. The activism of these organizations prior to and during 1970 led Brand to identify herself as "a kind of black Nationalist who saw affinity with African-Americans, and looked for a past in Africa as really central" to her own sustaining sense of racial identity, affiliation, and history (Birbalsingh 121).[6] Undoubtedly, upon arrival in Canada, Brand's strong identification with Black Nationalism, and her sense of being at the centre of a cultural and political community—one not dependent for validation upon Canada's blessing—fuelled her drive to produce and nurture the counter-discourse she believed necessary. This awareness and appreciation of an overarching Black history has remained a powerful grounding force for Brand.

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[6] Birbalsingh provides a brief account of the nature of, and the actions pursued by, the first of these two groups:

> The Trinidad Black Panther party modeled itself on the American Black Panthers.... They were part of a Black Power Movement whose members formed the National Joint Action Committee and led a demonstration against the trial, in Canada, of Trinidad students who were accused of conspiring to burn down the computer centre at Sir George Williams University, in Montreal. The climax came in 1970 when three quarters of the Trinidad and Tobago regiment under Lt Rex La Salle revolted. A state of emergency was declared, and the revolt (or uprising) suppressed when Venezuela and the US sent arms and ammunition to the government of Trinidad and Tobago. (n. 6, 136)

Questioned in 1989 by Dagmar Novak about whether she considered herself to be working on the margins of Canadian writing, Brand's response—refreshing and edifying in its displacement of conventional notions of what, in Canada, constitutes the "centre"—was negative:

> I find myself in the middle of black writing. I'm in the centre of black writing, and those are the sensibilities that I check to figure out something that's truthful. I write out of a literature, a genre, a tradition, and that tradition is the tradition of black writing. And whether that black writing comes from the United States as African American writing or African Caribbean writing or African writing from the continent, it's in that tradition that I work. (Novak 273)

Challenging Novak's presumption of the centrality of Euro-centric sensibilities, Brand's alignment of her writing with a pan-African tradition is a healing declaration of the intrinsic value of Black discourse, which confirms that Blacks in Canada need not tie their evaluation of Black-centred writing to its commercial or popular status in Canada. Indeed, to rely upon Canada's proponents of dominant Anglo-centric cultural and aesthetic values to determine Black writing's relative location with respect to a social binary of centre/periphery is to surrender valuation of that material to sensibilities largely indifferent or hostile to variance within the Canadian canon.[7] While Brand's professed alliance to a Black tradition by no means guarantees the success of her writing *within*

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[7] For Brand's perspective on the sanctity of "dominant discourse" and the Canadian canon, see her comments to Makeda Silvera in "In the Company of My Work," 369–70; see also Brand's "Who Can Speak for Whom?" in *Brick* 46 (Summer 1993) 19–20.

Canada, it does provide a form of psychic fortification by making accessible a necessary Black-affirmative discourse.

... and the sine qua non of representation

It would, of course, be unproductive to formulate an essentialized catalogue of issues, apprehensions, and aspirations allegedly experienced in a uniform way by any given population in Canada, Black or otherwise. It is not carelessly idealistic, however, to suggest the Black-centred literature Brand envisioned early on, and to which she is a substantial contributor, calls attention to persistent, historical conditions endured by Blacks in Canada and the Caribbean, particularly conditions of racial, economic, and gender oppression. Brand's fiction explores, in specific contexts, the socio-economic conditions Blacks have been subjected to and that have been veiled within, or simply omitted from North American and European literatures attuned to white sensibilities.

What, then, do the pragmatics of Black-centred discursive representation in fiction entail? This question has at least two responses, the second of which I will address a bit later on in this chapter. One answer that Brand offers to this query, however, is that first and foremost, "[t]he work is always bound up in trying to find one's central voice, or one's voice as a central subject, and also in trying to find safety, places of safety" (Wanyeki et al. 21). I interpret the latter half of this statement to signify that in North America, where Black presence is more often than not marginalized or criminalized, Black-centred literature prefigures a generative standpoint that presupposes the genuine, de facto value of Black existence: historical context, cultural practices, economic conditions, political objectives, and social priorities. Perhaps this is why Brand says of her writing process, "each time I write, I find that I've got to go back. I have to go back five hundred years to come back again" (Novak 273).

Brand's emphasis on the historical basis of her own fiction, and the emphasis she places on shared stories that work to contextualize components of Black life as she documents them in other genres, is not put forward as a form of apologia for the contemporary socio-economic and -political disenfranchisement of Blacks, but as the requisite historical template that must be acknowledged when confronting the discursive undermining of Black history. Brand remarks, "Fundamentally, I work against stereotyping. My writing is directed against stereotypes and so I am bound to show complexity in the characters I produce. I am not trying to 'show cultural differences' in my writing; I am not even trying to portray a 'racial group'" (Novak 276).[8] In this instance, it is necessary to differentiate between an author's impulse to represent what exists around her—for its own sake, and to claim its legitimate space in the world—and any claim made to represent to the hegemonic the likeness of a population—for the purpose of presenting the other as an interpretable, assimilable object. The distinction might well turn on the location one occupies in the dominant social hierarchy, Brand acknowledges: "What you read into a text so far as that is concerned depends on your stance, your location. The white reader may perceive cultural difference, but I am merely writing myself" (Novak 276).

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[8] Brand addresses Novak's inability to make this critical differentiation with the following comments:

> It seems to me that only works written by writers who are not white are called upon to prove or provide universality. White literature is never called upon to commit itself in this way, but all other literature must abandon its specific projects to fit into the understanding of white literature as the expression of white sensibilities. White critics have a preoccupation with rationalizing, homogenizing meanings into white cultural codes which are, of course, loaded with historical relations of power. Universal, therefore, means white. In that context I do not care about what is universal. I write about what is specific. (272–73)

Brand vehemently resists the othering implicit in the mode of reading that requires literature written by people of colour to *represent* or *explain* people of colour *to* the perpetrators of hegemonic discourse, what Brand identifies "as the colonizing subject" (Personal interview). Brand has no patience for those who self-identify "as that kind of subject, think of themselves as the colonizing subject. And [who] sit asking you things as if you should bring them into knowledge: 'Where you come from? I'm the centre of the world. How come I didn't know about you?'" Against the essentializing instinct of "the colonizing subject," then, Brand leverages the articulate specificities of her subjectivity—as a Black Canadian, a woman, and a lesbian—to oppose a matrix of historical, cultural and institutional practices that seek to restrict her participation in Canadian society. To "write yourself" within a social order bent on your containment demands an unwavering cognitive grip on the legitimacy of your claim to full rights in the world.

Finally, Brand's work serves to reformulate assumed common-sense knowledge. "I believe that history, and the history of the people I come from, is important, and that it is important to rewrite that history in a way that saves our humanity," Brand asserts; "Black people and women have to make their humanity every goddamned day, because every day we are faced with the unmaking of us" ("Writing It" 34). Because this project of "unmaking" is a feature of all dominant, hegemonically-invested genres, motivated mediated by assorted degrees of consciousness and intentionality, Brand's counter-by diminished, devalued social capital. A reader attentive to Brand's political agenda—that is, to write Black women into the historical record, to broadcast them into wider social consciousness—will draw from her fiction a portrayal of concrete socio-economic trends and inequalities. Moreover, Brand's narratives do purport to represent subjectivities shaped and directed by temporally constituted, dialectical social discourse. By directing attention to the issues about which her oeuvre revolves, and, therefore, in producing something original, Brand enlists the medium first to heighten awareness of the historical absence of, and the current need for, a Black presence in literature; second, to claim and define the literary space necessary for a Black-centred discourse; third, to develop that discourse in a manner that contextualizes historically and socially the inequalities that have affected Blacks, particularly women; and fourth, to transform social consciousness and (re)condition readers' emotional, moral responsiveness to Black-centred issues.

Brand's fiction comprises a broadly directed counterhegemonic discourse that either corrects or opposes, by dint of its several departures from culturally dominant discursive modes, a range of omissions and essentialist representations characteristic of patriarchal principles and imperialist readings of race, gender, and class. In light of Brand's childhood keenness for literature and language, it is not surprising that a desire to generate affirmative representations of Blacks in literature would prove to motivate her own work as an author of fiction.

Seeking narratives of representation

A theme that surfaces frequently in Brand's interviews, and one she addresses variously in her non-fiction writing, is her marked awareness of the skewed and inadequate representation of Blacks in the literature with and through which she was educated: "[F]rom colonial dame school to post-graduate work in North America, from 'see Dick run' to Habermas, I had been forced to read and learn about white people" objects Brand (*NBC* 28–29). I use the word *through*, here, advisedly; Brand clearly understands that literature, among other colonial devices, is a socially directed and ideologically loaded apparatus, one the British mobilized in all of their territories for the purpose of colonizing subjects. Among the blunt effects colonial education had upon the colonized, Brand avers, was a diminished sense of self—particularly for those Black and female. About this practice and its effects, Brand comments, "[a]ll the school systems we have gone to, all the educative processes which they quickly instituted, have been about our destruction. We've sat in classrooms and just got destroyed, about who we are and how much less of humankind we are as women and as people of colour" (Wanyeki et al. 20).[1] By and large, this demeaning process was due to the non-appearance of people of colour within prescribed literature, or, when they did appear, through their depiction in flat, degraded, and stereotypically distorted forms.

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[1] Brand asserts that among the practical effects of "that whole European colonial project was not only the economic and brutish conquest of place but the attempt to conquer the minds and spirits of those people it encountered—You can't do one without the other because to be continually brutish takes a lot of time, energy and money" (Wanyeki et al. 20).

For further reading on the use of English as a instrument in the British colonizing project see Chris Baldick's *The Social Mission of English: 1848–1932* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1983), and Gauri Viswanathan's *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York: Columbia UP, 1989).

Brand's reflections on her colonial education sketch her progression from an initial discomfort with syllabus materials and the emotional void they produced, by way of racial elision, to her desire to find herself represented. This evolution resulted in Brand's epiphany that if she wanted to engage with that manner of representation, she would have to follow her impulse to "write [her]self." In interview with Eva Tihanyi, Brand details her disenchantment with her British-based education in Trinidad while she asserts that the erasure of Blacks was anything but accidental:

> I … became aware of the perniciousness of being educated out of yourself and how deliberate that was, insofar as the island that I came from was a colony of England, and there were assumptions about its "inferiority" within the mind of the colonizers. So the "classics" were not taught merely for the sake of literature but for the purpose of colonizing. I began to feel uncomfortable with who I was reading about. These works never "contained" me. And when that became apparent, but more, when I felt myself or "us" as an absence in that work, I felt not only resentment but loss and loneliness for myself. Then I began seeking other writing, writing which would mend that loss. (8)[2]

Certainly, the absence of Blacks from school literature—which to a large degree would define for schoolchildren immersed in a British educational system precisely who is worthy of attention and respect in the world—does little to affirm a sense of individual or collective worth; nor does it provide positive, external cultural reinforcement.[3] What I want to propose here is that for all practical purposes Brand's search for "writing which would mend that loss" becomes the object pursued in all genres she employs; although any single form is inadequate to the task of cultural and racial affirmation, each genre plays its role in laying out the necessary representational foundation.

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[2] Brand's first satisfaction in this quest was found in the literature of Black revolt, first with James Jess Hannon's *The Black Napoleon: Toussaint L'Ouverture Liberator of Haiti*, and later with C.L.R. James's *The Black Jacobins*. Mention of both works surfaces with regularity in Brand's oeuvre.

The genre of fiction, in particular, allows for sustained engagement: the sustained pursuit of ideas across mixed social, historical, and geographical terrains; the prolonged involvement of the reader in a narrative that envelops and evolves, shades and illumines; the lasting perusal of accounts that garner shifts in readerly consciousness by displacing the familiar with articulations born of disparity and otherness. Moreover, the reader's abiding immersion in fiction can affirm experience, street sense, and communal wisdom. Author Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn professed in his 1970 Nobel Lecture:

> I believe that world literature has it in its power to help mankind, in these its troubled hours, to see itself as it really is, notwithstanding the indoctrinations of prejudiced people and parties. World literature has it in its power to convey condensed experience from one land to another so that we might cease to be split and dazzled, that the different scales of values might be made to agree, and one nation learn correctly and concisely the true history of another with such strength of recognition and painful awareness as if it had itself experienced the same, and thus might it be spared from repeating the same cruel mistakes. (45)

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[3] The power of the British colonial education system to alienate colonized individuals from local socio-cultural mainstays and values is in evidence in many novels from former colonies: Erna Brodber's *Myal* (London: New Beacon Books, 1988), Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* (Seattle: Seal P, 1989), and Michelle Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* (New York: Penguin, 1996), are but three examples.

While Solzhenitsyn refers to nations, the transnational nature of labour and migration implies that race, too—which is often a determinant in people's movements—is another category about which literature might "convey condensed experience." Literature's generic stretch and sweep makes the necessary immersion within textual difference possible: it engages the reader's imagination and consciousness in a way film's externality—vis-à-vis the viewer—proscribes. Fiction elicits a degree of readerly participation in the realization and creation of the text in a manner the didactic essay cannot, nor seeks to do.

Brand's writerly endeavour, in part to write Blacks into the historical record, must be relentless and pervasive because mass media's deficient representation of Blacks and people of colour is as uniform as it is persistent: "In all media, we do not have a presence, or our presence is subject to whatever the white characters in them need. That's true of documentary and feature films, novels as well as non-fiction works," Brand observes (Wanyeki et al. 20). She maintains that the process necessary to counter social erasure must include the concerted fostering of self-respect and -legitimization, something that cannot be achieved by means of the dominant genres as they are currently deployed. To this end, Brand brings the strengths of a conventional, familiar genre—for example, the portability and the educative potential of documentary film—and the freshness of less predictable forms—the direct and compelling immediacy of oral herstory—to challenge the barrage of misinformation and stereotype that position Blacks in North American society; she builds these resources to begin to fill the void of accurate representation and socio-historical contextual information and thereby demonstrate the provisional nature of rebellion.[14] In a contemporary re-enactment of that flight, Verlia, Abena (following her mother), and later Elizete set forth from the Caribbean and end up in southern Ontario, notably the de facto terminus of the Underground Railroad. McCallum and Olbey observe:

> By deploying the convention of the "flight to Canada," Brand finds a generic framework within which to represent the highly ambiguous phenomenon of migration as it fits into the dynamics of North-South relations in the current moment of capitalist globalization, and to deconstruct the persistent notion (attested to in the waves of legal and illegal immigration by peoples of the South into the North) of the wealthy nations of the North as already being utopia. (169)

The principal challenge in Verlia and Abena's modernization of this flight is the persistently oppressive cultural climate they confront after their arrival; the crushing labour conditions Elizete must submit to as an illegal migrant belies the optimism of flight. In the previous chapter I glossed Prabha Khosla's interviews (in *Fireweed* 16) with immigrant women at work in a clothing sweatshop in Metro Toronto, and in the orchards of BC's Fraser and Okanagan valleys—women in low-wage labour positions who want for any union representation. Were *West* substituted for *East*, Khosla's "Profiles of Working Class East Indian Women" could easily be a document about women like Elizete. *In Another Place, Not Here* thus makes the "interlinking of a distant past of flights from oppression with more recent, similar forms explicit," write McCallum and Olbey (168). Building on the framework of the neoslave narrative, the novel troubles the conventional reading of Canada, one fastidiously cultivated in-country, as a land of escape and hope for the economically and politically disenfranchised. In this regard, Brand's novel serves a necessary corrective function: it provides a lens that refigures Canada's historical, race-based inequities while it insists upon their material effects.

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[14] Robin Winks writes, "[i]n the thirty most widely known fugitive slave accounts published between 1836 and 1859, British North America is mentioned in all but four." Winks continues, ironically: "[O]f these twenty-six accounts, few can be said to provide anything like a realistic picture of conditions in Canada West" (241).

With regard to the role of labour, McCallum and Olbey assert, "Brand's deployment of the [neoslave narrative] convention of work performs the crucial function of defending her text from being explicated at a merely individualistic level of the romantic interaction between Verlia and Elizete" (171). In the novel's opening sequence, while cutting sugarcane on the Oliviere plantation, Elizete is first struck by the sight of Verlia who has taken up a machete to work in the fields in order to demonstrate her alliance with the working people she has come to win over in the name of organizing revolution. Simultaneously soothed and beguiled by Verlia's appearance in the field—"That woman like a drink of cool water. The four o'clock light thinning she dress, she back good and strong, the sweat raining off in that moment when I look and she snap she head around, that wide mouth blowing a wave of tiredness away" (*IAP* 3)—Elizete's spirit is galvanized by Verlia's presence; Elizete's body, however, remains ever vulnerable to harm, as she sinks her cutlass into her foot, "blood blooming in the stalks of cane." Even while her romantic preoccupation cannot miraculously protect the material body from danger, so Elizete's obligation to nourish her physical body places her in harm's way as she performs fatiguing, hazardous work in the field: "I look up saying to myself, how many more days these poor feet of mine can take this field, these blades of cane like razor, this sun like coal pot. Long as you have to eat, girl" (3). The pragmatics of hunger, the need for physical sustenance, binds Elizete's body to labour in a dynamic similar to that lived by Blacks made slaves in an earlier era, individuals for whom the performance of hard labour was the only means to escape the whip, or worse. True to the principles of a politically-minded Black artistic tradition, Brand's fiction enacts art as a socially-engaged and -transformative practice:[15] although a love story, *In Another Place, Not Here* does not grant ascendance to romance at the cost of ignoring oppressive material conditions.

Of course, the pragmatics of physical survival does not cease for Elizete once she is on the ground in Canada. The need to find work and lodging to become constants for her, as they are for the other women who share the Toronto underworld of illegal immigrant labour, including Jocelyn, a woman Elizete meets "from home" (79). The anonymous garment and shoe factories where she and the other women find work, the conditions of labour that only utilize and manipulate their bodies like machine cogs, have no use for these women as humans. Elizete's experience of her body becomes fragmented, its parts very nearly expendable:

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[15] In an early piece on Brand's poetry, H. Nigel Thomas names her as a member of a group he identifies as "communal artists." Thomas writes:

> To people of African origin, art was and, in some degree, still is a portrayal of the highest ideals of the society, of its laws that must not be transgressed, of those dangers that society should avoid. In short, artists were and could still be guardians of their society's morals. Contemporary black literary artists are faced with the choice … to address the concerns of their people in language that their people understand. ("A Commentary on the Poetry of Dionne Brand," *Kola* 1.1 (Winter 1987) 52)

Although Thomas's description borders precariously on an essentialist reading of Black art as a non-differentiated category, his assessment resonates, nonetheless, with the correlation affirmed by my own document: that is, serious-minded art in the Black community promotes a socio-political agenda that aims to communicate with, and to represent, an obscured class.

> Her left hand and ear were numb. Her hearing on that side seemed to fail her. She hoped that she wasn't going to lose things like that one by one out of having to make up stories. It seemed so easy … letting go of parts of herself, freeing in a way to be someone made up every new day, and the joke of it, when she and Jocelyn joked about the trick of it, the intelligence. "Brains," they called it, "Brains" losing parts of themselves, losing reasons to hold on to their physical likeness. (85–86)

The apostle Matthew declared, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). Elizete, wary of her impermanence, and fearful of losing her parts and character to mindless work and abuse, is alert to the need for a higher connection, some provision for the human spirit that affords more than survival of mere "physical likeness." "God, she knows, is deaf, male, and graceless" (*IAP* 89), and thus her flight to Canada demands something other than God's words, which give her no quarter. "She had come here for something and the something seemed further and further away as long as she stayed tied to work and suffering again" in conditions that differ little, but for the details, from the labour she performed in the Caribbean (101). Elizete's willingness to unknot the fibres of her self-identity in order to facilitate her use as a machine of labour ultimately moves her further away from the realm of love, discussion, substantive change, and physical pleasure that first enabled her vision of something better with Verlia.

Because work cannot sustain her spirit, and because Elizete is unwilling to lose her identity and inner purpose merely to work, she hunts out Abena, Verlia's former lover in Toronto, so she might gain the human connection necessary to maintain a connection with the spirit of the woman they have both known—to generate a collectivity, even of two, within which to make meaningful Verlia's life sacrifice for a cause beyond herself. Brand writes of Elizete's quest for Abena:

> She had to tell her. Well, if she could form it herself, she wouldn't have anything to tell her. When she saw her she would know. And Abena would know too. Elizete was a woman without a reason to live if she could tell her nothing, without a reason to have come and without a reason to have… She needed to feel the same pain with someone else, or the pain would not exist and the reason…. (*IAP* 103)

The ability and opportunity to communicate shared values and common experience makes up the psychological mortar that binds a community, builds a necessary human connection that only gains urgency under conditions of stress and alienation. Without this connection, "Elizete was a woman without a reason to live." The ambiguous pronoun references that concludes this sentence—"if she could tell her nothing"—implies that any sharing that will give meaning to Verlia's death, and validate Elizete's and Abena's bond with her, must be reciprocal.

The fulcrum of the organic intellectual's project to cultivate class-consciousness is the construction of a coherent, collective awareness, a body of collective subjects. This ambition is also an objective at the heart of Brand's oeuvre, one that becomes credible (indeed tenable) only when, as James Olney suggests, systemic oppression and exploitation is demonstrable as "an institution and an external reality, rather than a particular and individual life as it is known internally and subjectively" (154). Because, as Joan W. Scott argues, historians cannot un-problematically supplant extra-personal

History with the "experience" of private subjects—or impulsively disregard the provisional nature of individual truth—the amalgamation of "an external reality" is reliant upon signification by a social collectivity, building an essential critical mass. In this regard, fiction serves a maieutic purpose: it raises to consciousness the latent "past [that] is also something that hovers in our [Black] imaginations," Brand claims: something "which shadows the times that we live in now," and that is constitutive of collaborative historical memory (Walcott and Sanders 24).

Critic Ashraf Rushdy, writing on Ishmael Reed's neoslave narrative, *Flight to Canada*, says of Reed's narrator, Raven, that he discovers "he cannot control his story so long as it remains only his story. That personal story … has to become an expression of collective identity and a representation of a communal experience in order not to be appropriated" (124). The notion of controlling a story by means of sharing it might seem incongruous, but indeed the paradox lies in a telling that begins to build collective knowledge. The "expression of collective identity" is more difficult for dominant discourse to appropriate when such expression effectively shapes counterhegemonic thought, articulation, and action. A collective counter-discourse threatens "to undo seemingly fixed positionings, to open up the spaces of possibility, a space of imagining another way of life" (McCallum and Olbey 176). In her fiction, Brand unlocks space for variation and discrepancy, for the pursuit of previously inarticulate ideals. She prods and unshackles the imagination, provokes the exploration of alternative modes of existence and communication in community.

In addition to the three common elements of the slave narrative that McCallum and Olbey associate with *In Another Place, Not Here*, I suggest Brand integrates two additional elements of the slave narrative into her rendition of the neoslave account. The first of these is the identification, by name, of the novel's two principal characters. The two halves of the novel are entitled "Elizete, beckoned" (1), and "Verlia, flying" (119). As Olney points out, the details of the slave narrative are conventionally attached to the experiences of a specific individual. Olney writes: "With the ex-slave, … it was his existence and his identity, not his reason for writing, that were called into question: if the former could be established the latter would be obvious and the same from one narrative to another" (155). While *In Another Place, Not Here* does not offer the slave narrative's common parade of respectable witnesses to legitimate the authenticity of the account's author, or the accuracy of the narrative, the novel's characters are identified by name so that their accounts, such as they are, cannot be confused with another's.

Moreover, with respect to names, the reader is only privy to Elizete and Verlia's first names. It is characteristic of slave narratives that the individual subject rejects the surname name imposed upon him or her by the former owner, and takes "a new last name … to accord with [a] new social identity as a free man [or woman]" (Olney 153). The fact that Elizete and Verlia lack surnames, enforced or adopted, symbolizes their ambiguous standing within the Caribbean and North American socio-economy hierarchy, where they achieve some autonomy but true independence or parity remain elusive. The implication is that neither has achieved the status of a "free [woman]."

Olney also proposes that the first convention of the slave narrative is 'a first sentence beginning, 'I was born…,' then specifying a place but not a date of birth" (153). Although Brand does not begin her neoslave narrative in strict accordance with Olney's observation, she does flirt with the convention. Elizete's story, for example, begins with a form of *re*-birth, touched off by her awareness and vision of Verlia. Elizete remembers:

> [Y]ou see I know I was going to lose something, because Verl was surer than anything I see before, surer than the day I get born, because nothing ever happen to me until Verl come along and when Verl come along I see my chance out of what ordinary, out of the plenty day when all it have for a woman to do is lie down and let a man beat against she body, and work cane and chop up she foot and make children and choke on the dryness in she chest and have only one road in and the same road out and know that she tied to the ground and can never lift up. (*IAP* 4)

Elizete's birth "out of what ordinary" and into a new life of possibilities represents an internal metamorphosis: a birth into a liberating psychological frame of reference that empowers her to make decisions to abide by her will, even if the material world refuses to release her from the grasp it maintains on her body.

Verlia, too, achieves a form of re-birth when she moves to Toronto to create a future for herself. She escapes from the island and the stultifying world of her family, so inept at imagining a future that differs from their deadening circumstances. Brand's contemporary rendering of the slave narrative's "I was born" generic convention attends to the necessity of an ideological transformation at the personal level, recognizing that an internal, empowering frame of reference must emerge long before a shift in hegemony will come about.

Pragmatics: complex, coherent portrayal

Earlier in this chapter, I posed a question about what the pragmatics of Black-centred discursive representation in fiction might entail, and then proposed two possibilities. My first resolution fixed on the necessity of Black-centred discursive representation to hold, as its sine qua non, the incontrovertible centrality of Blacks as de facto social constituents; moreover, elements of historical context, cultural practices, economic conditions, political objectives, and social priorities pertinent to Blacks must also figure. To fill out this response, a pragmatics of Black-centred discursive representation will also, at a minimum, address the need for well-rounded portrayals of Black characters with demonstrable cognitive—albeit, not always coherent—rationales that derive from socio-historical frameworks.

This is not to suggest that all decisions made and actions taken by fictional characters must manifest as rational responses to circumstances; rather, while it is necessary to acknowledge that some compulsions and impulses are neither sensible nor prudent, they nevertheless derive as "logical" responses to a set of conditions, be they social, physical, emotional, or psychic. As *human* characters, Brand's protagonists, like those of any author, are susceptible to poor logic, and suffer from flaws of character. Brand, in her portrayal of characters, provides the fictional leeway requisite for the development of rounded characters that demonstrate coherence within recognizable social frameworks, as the characters understand them.

Inevitably, the challenge Brand's characters face is that of rendering coherent the overarching hegemonic and historical frameworks within which they pursue their individual agendas. As Blacks living in racist cultures, who suffer marginalization and socio-economic oppression, their struggle remains that of the proletariat, which is to develop a coherent class-consciousness that will enable them to respond, as a collective body, to oppressive conditions.

The representation of Black characters as fully dimensional and complex humanity has not been the standard established by white-centred literature or media. Brand pans mainstream media's portrayals of Blacks in which "Black characters … never had any motivations. In Tarzan movies [for example] there's no motivation, you just see all these Black people running after Tarzan. What for? In order to dehumanize people, you strip them of reason, of motivation. I wanted to draw us as we were." Brand elaborates:

> Because I was struck by the Little Black Sambo and god knows what other derogatory stereotypes I had to handle when I was growing up, I always thought that the way I would present and represent and articulate when I wrote, Black senses, if you like, would be in all their variousness. We had been struck as a piece of cardboard, just flat; my job as a writer was to express all of it, as complex and contradictory as it comes and goes, to address how I knew I lived, how I knew my grandmother lived, [and to] address … motivations…. ("Writing It" 36)

This overarching concern to demonstrate individualized psychological coherence or rationale is a subject I wish to take up in relation to *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, a novel that considers with keen scrutiny the nature of individual and family development in a locale where family origin and lineage is uncertain, in which a sense of extended family, of belonging, is by and large rendered unattainable because familial fragmentation and geographic dispersal quite literally define family.

discursive responses span all genres. In this regard, each response can be said to be necessary but—because counterhegemonic—inherently non-sufficient.

Fiction, because of its composite nature, is uniquely positioned to address a range of issues. Not the least of these priorities is Black-centred literature's claim to a vision of the world wherein the centrality of Blacks is not only a positive presupposition, it is an unshakable certainty. Brand's first novel, *In Another Place, Not Here* (1996), takes up this responsibility by highlighting some of the lapses evident in critical consciousness that help make the contemporary disenfranchisement of Blacks appear isolated, coincidental, and temporally discrete.

In Another Place, Not Here and the neoslave narrative

In my examination of *In Another Place, Not Here* I intend to outline the generic elements Brand deploys to highlight the abusive practices and the physical exploitation Black women have been subjected to under conditions that are historically grounded in and currently sanctioned by the economic licence of capitalism. Manipulating some of the common generic features of slave narratives, *In Another Place, Not Here* invites readers to reflect critically on the role assigned to Black women within the transhistorical and transnational economic machinery of capitalism—that is, of dehumanized, indiscriminately exploitable labourers. One effect of Brand's narrative is heightened sensitivity to the typicality of a set of labour and social relations and, subsequently, increased attentiveness to the collective nature of a set of experiences derivative of the longstanding disenfranchisement of Blacks in the Caribbean and North America. Brand's juxtaposition of the exploitative historical practices of slavery and the contemporary mechanisms of socio-economic oppression works to unite in readerly consciousness the analogous practices and ideological justifications, albeit temporally nuanced, that enable Black women's disenfranchisement.

In their shrewd article, "Written in the Scars: History, Genre and Materiality in Dionne Brand's *In Another Place, Not Here*," Pamela McCallum and Christian Olbey's principal assertion is that the novel displays generic affinities with neoslave narratives, a literary form they report has proliferated since the mid-1960s.[9] Brand's contribution to the growing corpus of neoslave narratives represents a "generic emergence [that functions as] a strategic means of building on past cultural constructions of oppression and liberation in order to speak more effectively to contemporary forms of oppression and liberation" (McCallum and Olbey 165). Drawing on Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious*, McCallum and Olbey emphasize that shared generic conventions—in this instance, those of antebellum slave narratives—position given works within generally recognizable, and thus evocative fields of signification.[10] If one recalls Brand's statement about who it is she writes *to*—the "specific public," in Jameson's sense, to which *In Another Place, Not Here* is addressed—her readership would seem to be "this hearer who must hear it out of the history of colonialism and slavery, and [the] continued kind of oppression in the world as we know it today" (*LS* 432). Brand's declaration implicates a readership not necessarily expert in, but at minimum conversant with, the fundamentals of slave narratives. Within this group, albeit loosely identifiable as an aggregate collectivity, consolidation of critical consciousness around the socio-historical and -economic matrix fusing the history of slavery with contemporary socio-economic practices is of central concern to Brand as an organic intellectual.

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[9] McCallum and Olbey point to Margaret Walker's *Jubilee* (1966), Ishmael Reed's *Flight to Canada* (1976), and Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (1987) as examples of this trend.

[10] Writing of the significance of antebellum slave narratives as a liberating social force prior to and during the U.S. Civil War, McCallum and Olbey cite C.L.R. James who affirms the narratives' function as the "literary expression of a 'direct social movement … the movement of the slaves and the free Negroes for freedom'" (qtd. in McCallum and Olbey 166).

Brand's acknowledgement of systemic, sustained forms of oppression underscores a convention of class-, gender-, and race-based subjugation propagated by—and organized in aid of—capitalism. In an age when the flighty, transnational nature of global capitalism becomes more and more diffuse, by dint of capital's increasingly virtual deployment, the inevitable impact it has upon "the more material sites of the bodies and psyches of [the] victims" requisite for capitalism's successful execution remains substantive (McCallum and Olbey 165). At least for its readers, *In Another Place, Not Here* challenges the maintenance of the sort of uncritical and unthinking abstraction that capitalism benefits from in the West and which obscures the harsh impacts that befall its menials.[11] In her first novel, Brand makes use of elements characteristic of antebellum slave narratives and in this way ties her portrayal of recent historical events in an unnamed third-world country (particularly the rise of organized revolutionary activities and subsequent destructive U.S. invasion) to the larger framework of exploitation and migration. Brand's disinclination to name the country in which the novel begins directs attention to the typicality of a set of practices that characterize women's exploitation within the framework of capital, regardless of location; crucially, however, Brand unequivocally identifies Canada as the first-world nation that sanctions such exploitation and thereby invites analysis of Canada's reliance upon the labour of subaltern classes.

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[11] Disturbingly, the phenomenon of abstraction that shields global capitalism from critical analysis still prevails in North America, the events of 11 September 2001 notwithstanding.

Citing James Olney's essay "'I was born': Slave Narratives, Their Status as Autobiography and as Literature," McCallum and Olbey claim Brand's *In Another Place, Not Here* deploys three of twelve conventions Olney identifies: "flight, the description of work, and the omnipresence of the whip—along with a fourth to which [Olney] alludes but does not explicitly list—the construction of collectivity" (McCallum and Olbey 167). McCallum and Olbey's essay provides a shrewd and succinct exploration of Brand's deployment of the conventions Olney points up in his essay. A focus on the migrant's "flight" to Canada, and "the description of work" performed by women of colour in the novel, is compulsory if only to underscore the correlation between historical precedent—the focus of several of Brand's sociological essays, and the subject of the preceding chapters[12]—and the socio-economic consequences of contemporary transnational "flight," bound as they are, in most cases, to the nature of the "work" women carry out.

"Between 1815 and 1865, and particularly after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, it is estimated that tens of thousands of African-Americans sought refuge on Canadian soil," Adrienne Shadd declares (41).[13] Indeed, the flight to Canada of U.S. slaves via the Underground Railroad was a practice that figured largely in the anti-slavery doldrums of Terre Bouillante and his submersion in the longed-for hustle of New York City.

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[12] Certainly the theme of Black women's steady burden of physical and domestic labour is taken up in Brand's two-part essay, "Black Women and Work," and "A Working Paper on Black Women in Toronto: Gender, Race and Class." See also Brand's "This Body for Itself" (*Bread Out of Stone*) 92–93.

[13] For a detailed account of Black women's experience with the Underground Railroad, see Adrienne Shadd's "'The Lord seemed to say "Go"': Women and the Underground Railroad Movement" (41–68) in Bristow et al.

Freedom from conscience, however, has arrested Priest's ability to connect on any levels other than inspiration of fear. He threatens and manipulates his sister, Eula, so that she will agree to drive with Gita his girlfriend, from Toronto to Gainesville, Florida, so that she can help him escape from an INS detention centre. Priest discovers that although Eula has come to retrieve him, she has reached her limit and refuses to be bullied by him any further. Brand writes: "He reached to jostle her shoulder in friendship, sensing that he was losing her. She was the only one of them not really afraid of him and that was why he didn't want to lose her. But all he had was threats. All his skill was violence. So he couldn't say, as he wanted to, thanks, Eula, thanks for coming" (171). The violence Priest has already perpetrated during their brief stint northward (in order to gain some control over Eula's anger, he forces Gita's head out the open door of the careening vehicle and toward the racing pavement) makes this imagined exchange appear implausibly sentimental. Brand's disclosure of this aspect of Priest's character, however rare and fugitive, is indicative of sincere, authentic, and sociable components of his person that belie his predatory and hostile nature as all consuming or unvarying.

In one of his final surfacings in the novel, Priest reaches out to Eula from his decayed life: he calls collect from Brooklyn to cry over the phone, to tell her he is eating out of garbage cans, and, in typically egoistic fashion, that he "couldn't get [his] cock up the last time with Gita" (245). The want of menace in his call, the absence of any transparent demand, points up the desperation and alarm he is living, his need for another's authentic concern. Here, again, Brand's portrayal of Priest as needy, despite—

or perhaps, more accurately, in addition to—the vulgarity, toughness, and callus indifference he has manifested towards the needs of others throughout the novel exposes a complexity of character that requires reflection and a degree of empathy in order to understand. By now, though, Eula holds no loyalty or love for him, and reviles the presumptuousness of his confidences. She declares: "I didn't want to know his life" (245).

The reality that even Priest's sister cannot abide him suggests that one with a greater degree of detachment from him—and in this context, the reader is implicated—is less likely to perceive him in a manner that is salved by family bonds. At the same moment, however, a reader, because of his remove from the text, and because his perspective is modulated by his status as onlooker, can perhaps read Priest's flaws with a greater compassion than can Eula.

Akin to the connection Priest searches for over the phone line, Eula requires a sense of connection and of home in order to balance the drift and uncertainty of her life. In a blue airmail letter—which, like the phone, is a symbol of diasporic disconnection—Eula writes to her mother, already dead, from Toronto: "I would like one single line of ancestry, Mama. One line from you to me and farther back, but a line that I can trace." She continues:

> One line like the one in your palm with all the places where something happened and is remembered. I would like one line full of people who have no reason to forget anything, or forgetting would not help them or matter because the line would be constant, unchangeable. A line that I can reach for in my brain when I

> feel off kilter. Something to pull me back.... I would like a village where I might remain and not a village I would leave. (246–47)

In this thematic foreshadowing of what will come in *A Map to the Door of No Return*, Eula craves an ancestral union that is, of course, quite unfeasible. Not least because of the diffuse and many-fathered diaspora of Bola's offspring—"Bola who spread her children around so that all would never be gathered in the same place to come to the same harm" (198). The "single line of ancestry" Eula desires is unattainable, moreover, due to the realities of slavery and exile from a greater Black ancestry. Brand remarks:

> I think that we, whose ancestors crossed that Middle Passage.... our histories are built on those ruins. Those ruins of faith, those ruins of directions, and we are closely, closely connected with those who ruined us. (*laughs*) I wanted to talk [in *A Map to the Door of No Return*] about how those things follow us, even if they do not exist anymore. How they take up our mind's life, whether we want [them] to or not. (Nuzhat 21)

While Brand rejects the notion of Black-authored literature as "a sociology of Black people," it is not possible to disregard the spectral presence of the Door of No Return, a force necessarily present in the fully-rendered portrayal—and cognitive makeup—of the kind of complex Black characters Brand seeks to generate. The complexities of Brand's characters, and those of the socio-economic and -historical frameworks within which they act, operate in opposition to the conventional, denigrating colonial-style portrayals of Blacks of the sort Brand was forced to assimilate as a student.

Text, narrative, and the reader: opening up room for manoeuvre

To fend off the essentialist grammars of dominant media—in short, the discourses of hegemony—Brand's fictional narratives flesh out the socio-historical and -economic contexts of race, gender, sexuality, immigrancy, and nation that shape Black subjectivities. Sometimes directly, at other times less so, her fictional discourse articulates a deconstructionist assault on the representative patterns of hegemonic narratives, those generic tendencies that proscribe fully-rendered portrayals of Black subjectivities and that, as genre, determine the kinds of stories that can be told. Brand's fiction provokes readers to reflect upon the classic matrix of ideological conflict—race, class, gender, and sexuality—rendering the quartet visible in order to persuade a "derisive kind of eye, an eye of cynicism," to refocus ideological lenses and thus refract perception and Black subjectivities differently ("In the Company" 360).

Ross Chambers, cited previously, might describe this productive refocusing of the reader as the effect of "'influence' [which] is best accounted for as that which brings about a change in *desire*—the further implication being that to change what people desire is, in the long run, the way to change without violence the way things are" (xii). Proposing that "oppositional reading is a reading of the oppositional situation in texts" (15), Chambers acknowledges that oppositional reading is, of necessity, contingent upon a reader's predisposition to read oppositionally. Chambers' meticulous deconstruction of the processes by which a reader's "desire" is piqued by "textual fiction" while it is inflected by the "narrative function," so as to alter perception, is at times Byzantine and recherché. It is sufficiently germane to a discussion of the relevance of Brand's fiction as an effective component of the organic intellectual project, however, that it requires some detailed attention here.

Initially, it helps to understand that Chambers focuses on two particular features of oppositional literature that effectively sustain public interest in a text and maintain the text's relevance to a readership. These are the "narrative function," or the blunt communication of information, and the "textual function"; it is the latter, he argues, that is ultimately the more influential of the two (16). Literature's "textual function" exercises influence over a reader because it operates with "a certain textual duplicity, in that the discourse of power," which all works traffic in, "reveals, through reading, an 'other' meaning (its irony), or its address coincides with an 'other' appeal." "[I]t is … the 'textual function,' understood in these two ways," proposes Chambers—that is, as "the 'other' meaning and the 'other' appeal—that constitutes textual identity as *split*" (16). Attention centred on this "'other' appeal" by the reader, Chambers suggests, enhances insight into power's authority to shape the perceived real. This is accomplished in much the same way that critical consciousness enhances one's recognition of ideology's determining influences.

The "narrative function" at work in Brand's *In Another Place, Not Here*, for example, emerges in the portrayal of Black female protagonists who act from the hub of their own experiences and not as the appendages of Black male characters, nor of white characters of either sex. The novel's "textual function," on the other hand, derives from a cultivation of "textual 'irony.'" Chambers explains: "textual 'irony' … can be described as [a consequence] of the discursive split between 'narrative' and 'textual' functions. Irony is the reading of that split as a disjunction between *what is said* and *what is meant* (and vice versa)" (237). A brief excerpt from the opening of the novel provides a fruitful illustration. While cutting cane, Elizete muses: "I never wanted nothing big from the world. Who is me to want anything big or small. Who is me to think I is something" (*IAP* 4). While "*what is said*" by Elizete in her internal monologue is plain enough, "*what is meant*" is necessarily determined, intentionally and subconsciously, by a reader's cognition of Elizete's inherent rights as a woman and human being (albeit fictional). What is more, a reader cognizant of Brand's feminist and marxist values will draw from the subtext of this excerpt an oblique assertion of Elizete's vital right to reside in a world that acknowledges her parity with others and accords her the privileges parity entails. This is the ironic "'other' meaning" named by Chambers that contests the "discourse of power," which, in the novel, holds no love for Elizete.

In the organic intellectual project, fiction's union of "textual function" and "narrative function" generates opportunity for "textual 'irony'"; in turn, this provokes in the reader an impulse to differentiate and compare. Textual "seduction," Chambers posits, "names the way a reader is led to make the shift from reading in the 'narrative function' to reading in the 'textual function,' with the attendant exploration of otherness (of textual otherness with respect to 'itself' but also the reader's own difference from 'self') and the shift in readerly desire that can result" (237). Ideally, the outcome of this experience is heightened critical consciousness, as readerly differentiation from hegemonically sanctioned subjectivities—"the reader's own difference from 'self'"—and the character of the subject represented in the text.

In Chambers' formulation, the "textual function" and "narrative function" of a given text hinge on Michel Serres's notion of "*tiers exclu*—the excluded third party—and that of *tertius gaudens*, the third who enjoys or profits" (24); this dynamic, he contends, illuminates the discursive interaction of reader and text. A reader's ability to read text oppositionally, Chambers persuades, depends on her simultaneous occupation of these two positions. As outsider to the events a text describes (*tiers exclu*), the reader participates in the story by learning about characters, relationships, plot lines, and like information; in this role the reader is subjected to text's "narrative function." In contrast, when a reader engages with the "textual function" (or meta-text) of fiction, she exists in the larger world *with* the text rather than the small world *of* the text; as such, she inhabits the role of *tertius gaudens*.

An analogy can be drawn between a reader of fiction who engages in these two roles—*tiers exclu* and *tertius gaudens*—and an individual at large in society. In society, he is conscious of the concrete particulars of his life—address and telephone number, job description and salary, the names and relationships of rivals and intimates, for example; he is aware, simultaneously, of the benefits, privileges, and responsibilities of that material life—the rewards or burdens conferred upon race and gender, his status within the relations of production, opportunities for social advancement, and restrictions levelled against social mobility. From this perspective, *tertius gaudens* might be interpreted more aptly as the third who is *included or subject to*, rather than one who "enjoys or profits."

Development of critical consciousness, of class-consciousness, is more likely to occur when a collectivized awareness is generated around the concrete particulars of personal narratives. The evolution of this process was explored in Chapter 2, in the context of Nelly Y. McKay's discussion of Black women's spiritual autobiographies. McKay proposes that while "the centrality and importance of the individual life initially motivates all autobiographical impulse," collective or collaborative consciousness is achieved only when the recurring nodes of individual lives "[compel] a revisionary reading of the collective … experience" (140). By way of fiction, the generic conventions of the neoslave narrative mobilized by Brand in *In Another Place, Not Here* lend critical mass to that collective experience as they highlight a broad range of encounters, across time and geographical location, with hegemonic practices and ideological opposition.

Chambers stresses that balancing a reader's positioning in the roles of *tiers exclu* and *tertius gaudens* is a necessary attribute of generative, oppositional reading. Of course, a reader will gain little in the way of insight from a text if his experience of it is one of total and unqualified identification: some experiential gap must differentiate the reader from the text. "Applied to the phenomenon of reading," Chambers reasons, "this notion [of *tiers exclu*] is the measure, then, of the remoteness and distance of *any* empirical reader from the concerns of *any* given text" (30).[17] Rather than impeding the "narrative function" of the text, however, this readerly separation "constitute[s] the indispensable 'noise' that disturbs the perfection of 'purely' textual relationships, but without which they cannot function" (31).[18] This element of "remoteness and distance" can easily become a stumbling block for first-time readers of Brand's fictions: unable to reconcile familiar hegemonic representations and cultivated common-sense conceptions of Canada with Brand's radically incongruous and impassioned criticism of dominant socio-ideological constructs, discombobulated readers might be tempted to dismiss Brand's articulations of provisional and factual critique as merely "angry." A reader must commit to make sense of the "noise" generated by the critical charges of racism and sexism that clash with the dominant discourse or nation-narratives that laud Canada's racial equality and opportunity.

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[17] In this sense, in contrast with Derrida, there is indeed a literal position "outside the text." Inevitably, such outsider status is ultimately offset by the reader's inexorable complicity with discourse.

[18] Chambers points out this engagement of the text by the reader is practically identified by disparate terminology: "phenomenologists call it 'actualization,' 'concretization,' or 'realization' of the text; hermeneuticists call it 'interpretation'…; structuralists and poststructuralists refer to 'analysis' or (its synonym) 'deconstruction'" (31).

While Chambers argues that unmitigated readerly identification with a text is not ideal or productive, neither is the categorical exclusion of the reader from a given fiction beneficial. A reader must engage (with) the text with some degree of intellectual and emotional concentration. Brand, too, addresses this point, as the second epigraph that heads this chapter indicates.

In consideration of this inevitable struggle between identification and exclusion, one might well ask, what is it that persuades a reader to maintain interest in a given fiction? In answer, Chambers reiterates an earlier thesis (first elaborated in his work *Story and Situation*), which posits "that the narrative relationship (narrator–narratee) is regularly figured in texts as an erotic one and the act of narration as the metaphoric equivalent of an act of seduction" (*Room for Maneuver* 27). Drawing on the work of René Girard, Chambers argues a reader's textual involvement springs from a kind of mimetic desire. The reader, witness to the seduction of the narratee by the narrator, "identif[ies] as desirable the object of seduction" (31). Positioning himself as the reader, Chambers elaborates on this dynamic:

While Brand writes to Blacks outside the literal domain of her fiction, she writes as much to those within it. When I questioned her about who it is she imagines she writes to, she responded:

> If I think—now you ask me to formulate that statement—I would say that I was probably writing to a kind of *hope*, of the possibility of people, and for all those people described in all the work that I've written. So now, it's just struck me that they've become the audience—you know, all the people in the work that I've written, in all the work that I've written—they've become the audience. Oh god. What a relief! (*laughter*) (Personal interview)

This construal of "writing to a kind of *hope*, [to] the possibility of people," is a powerfully optimistic indication of Brand's commitment to social recuperation and healing. It intimates an unexpectedly broad "audience"; however, for although she has said she writes "to Black people," "like signing a *letter* to someone" (Personal interview), this latter, more expansive formulation of "audience" is decidedly inclusive in spirit. Given that a wicked, ignorant, misogynistic character like Isaiah Ferdinand (*IAP*) populates the terrain of Brand's narratives, and given that *At the Full and Change of the Moon* includes a destructive figure like Priest, motivated only by the impulse toward self-preservation and therefore dangerous to all known to him, Brand's claim to write to "the possibility of people" suggests a vision of individual rehabilitation so far beyond the reach of everyday goodwill as to be either naïve or indicative of a profound ideological commitment. Her declaration that her writing is directed even to "the American boy soldier who had a gun on a whole bunch of us in '83 in Grenada" bolsters the plausibility of the latter (Personal interview).

At the Full and Change of the Moon

The issue of representation is one problematized for Brand by an assumption made by many white critics, particularly in Canada: that by writing fiction around Black characters, she is, in fact, producing a psychologizing text, something of a social manual for the demystification and interpretation of an inferred, essential *Black subject*. "As it is[,] Black writers are either reviewed for what might be plumbed from their work as a sociology of Black people or they are remarked upon for not presenting any signs of it at all," Brand chides, in interview with Walcott and Sanders (26). Although I suggested, earlier, that in fact Brand *is* interested in representing Black characters with genuine complexity and diversity, my claim does not necessarily contradict Brand's veto of her participation in "signing 'black behavior'" (Walcott and Sanders 26). Inevitably, critics bent on discerning the underlying motivations of "black behavior" will take what they choose to from the texts of Brand and other Black authors and apply what they glean to a larger, literal social body. Brand's commitment to a representation of Black characters "in all their variousness…. as complex and contradictory as it comes and goes," however, is an explicit rebuttal of the essentializing of Black character in Eurocentric portrayals and understanding of that body: it is a commitment to generate a *whole* character, shaped or distorted by the motivations that drive all characters: memory, family, history, greed, pleasure, benevolence, conscience.

In marked contrast to the anonymous mass of Black tribesmen of the Tarzan genre, "strip[ped] … of reason, of motivation," Brand's fiction consistently focuses on individual mental and emotional development and drives. "If I can be said to have a project, then it is to explore the interior life," Brand remarks, "[b]ecause I think that's a much more fertile place" to explore, since it is perception of the world that determines one's responses to it, and actions within it (Walcott and Sanders 25). Commenting on her development of the Adrian Dovett character, which appears in *At the Full and Change of the Moon*, Brand insists upon her curiosity about the individual character:

> If I write a male character, I'm supposed to represent maleness in some kind of way and I'm trying not to do that. *I'm really trying to do that person.* As wishy as that sounds, or as not up to the task of doing the political job, I'm really trying to write that guy that I saw on the street corner in Amsterdam because there was something that I saw that struck me about him, about his impatience, his dissatisfaction, his disaffection, his look of hauntedness. Just the fact that he had to be standing there on that corner, doing that. And where might he have come from? Who was he? (my emphasis, Walcott and Sanders 25)

Brand's remarks point up a deep hunger to imagine what has transpired to bring an individual character to a given location on the globe, to engage him in the life and decisions that he finds surround him. By imaging the potentialities of her characters, inscribing even a fictional history, Brand brings to bear some elements of an essential social experiential contextualization that put the lie to the a-historical, a-social narratives about Blacks that she encountered in school curricula.

In her own terms, *At the Full and Change of the Moon* is a novel about the kind of imagination required of the novel's characters to transport themselves around the globe as they do: Private Samuel Gordon Sones to Turkey with the Second West India Regiment during the First World War (76); Samuel's grandfather, Rabindranath Ragoonanan, from Gorakpur, India, to Trinidad, via Calcutta (77); Carlyle, known as Priest, from Terre

Bouillante to Florida, and then to New York City (159);[16] Adrian Dovett, from the oil fields of Cruaçao and on to Amsterdam, where he will meet up with his sister, Maya (177); Eula, from Terre Bouillante to Toronto, where her sister, Sese, has already relocated (231). Brand remarks on the novel and its characters,

> It is about how imagination is long, and open. And how, really, you are always guided by your imagination.... I was more interested in that kind of passage, a kind of opening. That all of those people would have had to have the most magnificent of imaginations to envision themselves where they had landed, or where I had seen them, or where I had apprehended them. And they would have had to have thought outside any of the other places that they have been. So it looks like they live on imagination. They arrive on the street on imagination because nothing real would tell them to be there. (Walcott and Sanders 23)

In contrast with Marie Ursule's failure to envision a future to sustain her beyond the condition of slavery, the broad diaspora of her descendents—the abundant offspring of her only child, Bola, turned loose—is a triumph of the imagination. Certainly the "real" example of Marie Ursule provided no hints about that "opening." Marie Ursule and her fellow slaves on the de Lambert plantation, Mon Chagrin, know that "only in the head could you kill yourself, never in the body." Because "the body was a terrible thing that wanted to live no matter what," the tragedy of their mass suicide is a particularly cerebral commitment to the attainment of peace at the cost of any future (*FCM* 17).

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[16] For perspective on the signifying nature of the nicknames claimed by men across generations, see Brand's "Brownman, Tiger..." (*Bread Out of Stone*) 69.

That said, I must acknowledge that the triumphal imagination of Bola's children, which I have here invoked, amounts, in many instances, to disaster. While Brand is intent upon generating fictional portrayals of Black characters that are well rounded, she is also, as I have argued, engaged with the contextualization of those characters within the material framework, social conditions, and historical events that relentlessly disorder the potential for stable personal, social, and economic networks. Brand is concerned with realistic fictions, not utopian imaginings.

By means of an impulsive, adolescent act of robbery, for example, Priest imagines his way free of the crush of shame that infuses the people and psychic terrain of Terre Bouillante, the former, clandestine refuge of the Maroons where his family resides. Priest's chosen course of action, though not based on wisdom, is nonetheless shrewd and economical:

> He no longer had to do anything inside the tight line of shame he had felt around his head, the waking up in the mornings ashamed, washing his feet and his face and his mouth ashamed, … eating whatever little there was with his head bowed, ashamed…. there was no cause he could point to for all this shame, and he didn't understand it and he didn't want it. (*FCM* 139)

Indeed, Priest ascertains the power he can wring from the shame of others, power he bends to his advantage when he discovers "relief at not having to appear good to anybody" (139). Priest's ability to imagine an alternative to the strictures of secretive Terre Bouillante proves the means that enables him to seize upon "[t]he gift [that] was the path of extremes" (147): to be a badjohn or a saint. In either case, he is free to commit what acts he will. Freedom from conscience makes possible Priest's escape from the

Chambers' logic suggests that some degree of change is inevitable, insofar as "one cannot unbecome what one has once become, unthink, unfeel, or undesire what one has once thought, felt, or desired." Under ideal circumstances, in which the reader actively "collaborate[s] with the text in the production of meaning" and consciously explores the implications of his or her own difference from hegemonically-endorsed subject positions, the positive, transformative nature of literary narratives is exercised to its fullest potential.

Chapter 5

Revising Borders: The Sense of What a Beautiful Life Might Be

> Survival is the triumph of stubbornness, and spiritual stubbornness, a sublime stupidity, is what makes the occupation of poetry endure, when there are so many things that should make it futile. Those things added together can go under one collective noun: "the world."
> ~ Derek Walcott, "The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory."

> The conclusion that I draw from the study of these poetic texts is that the only way to survive with dignity in Babylon is to proclaim fundamental values that are different.
> ~ Frederick Ivor Case, "Babylon and the Spirit Lash"

> Over the next few years, it's just starvation and poetry.
> ~ Dionne Brand, personal interview

Reading Brand's poetry, it quickly becomes evident that the scope of its subject matter—that is, the range of geographical address and attachment, the character of the events it speaks to, and the individuals that inhabit its pages—broadens over time. This evolution contrasts with the narrower focus on particular issues that describes Brand's documentary and oral herstory work, and, by and large, the non-fiction material considered in Chapter 3. With the publication of *'Fore Day Morning* in 1978, *Primitive Offensive* in 1982, *Winter Epigrams and Epigrams to Ernesto Cardenal in Defense of Claudia* in 1983, and *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun* in 1984, the advent of Brand's poetry precedes by up to eight years the launch of her first substantive prose work.[1] Although the mere span of years does not bestow upon poetry any particular guarantee of galvanizing lucidity, it stands to reason that over her twenty-nine years of writing poetry, culminating in 1997 with *Land to Light On*, it is in this genre that Brand's articulation exhibits the greatest evolution of social and philosophical meditation.

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[1] *Rivers Have Sources, Trees Have Roots: Speaking of Racism*, co-authored with Krisantha Sri Bhaggiyadatta and published in 1986, was Brand's first book-length prose work.

Self-identified as a poet first, Brand is drawn to the clarity of thought and sensuous specificity that the spareness of poetic expression requires, the object of which, in Brand's phrase, is to "reach for perfect speech" (Tihanyi 8). Poetry provides for Brand a fundamental outlet for the expression of perspectives deeply oppositional to traditional Western hegemonic social structures and organization. One facet of poetry that positions the genre as a vehicle of social resistance is that it is, as Adrienne Rich noted, "the least commoditized art" (8). For Brand, the want of poetry's commercial appeal stands it in good stead as a medium that can promote the anti-gospel of capital: "It resists markets, commercialism. And perhaps in today's world it can offer an alternative to the unrelenting idiocy of corporate culture" (9). Though part of the appeal of poetry undoubtedly inheres in its refusal of appropriation by the dominant paradigm of capitalism's social authority—saleability—this detail also explains in some measure poetry's even-less-than-tenuous influence in shaping social practices and policies in North America. After all, outside of France, and perhaps the Czech Republic, rampant oniomania rarely results in laying bare the poetry shelves of bookstores.

Brand is certainly not without her own reservations when it comes to the efficacy or practicality of poetry as a medium for the raising of critical social consciousness; this is a concern I will take up towards the end of this chapter. Nonetheless, beyond being a fundamental expressive outlet for her, poetry is also—like food and shelter—a basic necessity, a condition Brand reveals many times over in interviews and, in this instance, to Eva Tihanyi:

> Everything else comes from there. I have to have poetry going on to feel a certain sanity. The shape and order of poetry, its ability to contain universes of ideas which can lift you out of the immediate dread of living—and I don't mean lift you by deceit or fantasy but by clarity, a kind of sense-making which doesn't spare you the dread but offers you this clarity which is like being able to feel air or night, to feel the intangible. (8)

A poet's poet in her attention to the cadence, rhythm, and detail of language—in a sense, the onomatopoeia of meaningful expression—her verse is a form of elocutionary summons that rejects the possibility of a poet's amoral stance, or poetry's disengagement from the world as a social art. The poem's layers of textual signification, of sound, proffer a reading of North American and Caribbean social phenomena that runs counter to the reductive economy of language with which mass-media commonly dichotomize and compartmentalize the material experience of this world.

Citing a comment by Brand that "poetry is useless but something dangerous and honest," Tihanyi queries Brand's assessment of the danger-quotient of her own poetry (9).[2] Brand's response resonates with assurance that the capacity of poetry to name injustice, to articulate the systemic nature of inequality, and to communicate an alternative means of living is itself a tactical, edifying mobilisation of the sort of power that contests the status quo. She declares of the genre's usefulness, "I can comment on the political situation. I can object in poetry to the ways in which we are living, the ways in which we are made to live by the social structure. I think a poet is two things: someone who writes those things down, and also someone who advocates, vigorously, living in a great way" (9). How a poet formulates and expresses her protest, and in response to what in particular, is necessarily a product of a specific time, location, and set of cultural circumstances. In Gramsci's analysis, the form and content of that dissension is a product of the strong or weak relationship between civil society and superstructural conditions. In the West, this relationship has been characteristically robust, a fact that has affected the ideological aspirations and address of Brand's poetry.

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[2] Brand responds to Tihanyi's enquiry with an avowal that poetry is "[n]ot useless to me!" but adds that "in the society we live in, people think of it as fairly useless" (Tihanyi 9).

In an effort to account for the success, or at any rate, the attainment of revolution in the "East" (Russia and France, in Gramsci's taxonomy), and the historical failure of revolution to find purchase in the West, Gramsci proposes that "in the West, there was a proper [i.e. dialectical, symbiotic] relation between State and civil society, and when the State trembled a sturdy structure of civil society was at once revealed" (*Prison* 238). Salamini elaborates upon Gramsci's observation, commenting that "[i]n Western countries the civil society is highly organized on the level of consciousness, and on the level of ideology"; consequently, under "those conditions in which the civil society is strong, the struggle of subaltern classes had to take the form of a 'war of positions,' that of ideological confrontation with the dominant classes" (61).[3] Such a "war of positions" is necessarily levelled "against the civil society and not the political society"; it is also the kind of "war" in which Brand's poetry—and, indeed, the lion's share of her oeuvre—is engaged, as it undercuts staid hegemonic ideologies in order to advance "a new system of ideas, beliefs, and values," or Weltanschauung (60).

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[3] In contrast with a "war of positions," which engages principally with ideology, Salamini describes the "war of movements" as the form oppositional struggle takes "in [those] historical situations in which the civil society is 'primitive and gelatinous,' … which is essentially a politico-military struggle" (61).

It is certain that political change is an outcome Brand desires and one she strives to realize through her work; as certain, however, is her grasp of the intrinsically systemic nature of racism and sexism wherever it endures. In order to persist in society, common-sense racism and sexism must be nourished by the widespread support of civil society, and not simply propagated by government. When poetry, and writing in general, achieves any significant degree of dissemination—through established conduits such as higher education, libraries, book clubs, public readings, and as a result of individual interests—texts are more apt to touch and to inform civil society than they are to influence the inherently stolid and insulated political structures of government. It is by means of these channels that Brand engages in a "war of positions" to redirect, critically, common, public appraisals of ideological paradigms. Asked whether she believes "writing changes anything," Brand's response is somewhat tentative, but generally affirmative and promising:

> I hope so. When I first began to write at seventeen, I was *convinced* that it would. I recently did a reading at York University—about three hundred people—and I was overwhelmed. What they got out of the work, and the questions they could engage in about our times, the way we live, the power relations. So if writing can stir us to think about who we want to be, if it can stir us from repressive ways of thinking and oppressive ways of being, then I want to keep writing. (Tihanyi 9)

Brand's persistence as an author is a frank endorsement of her belief in the efficacy of writing as a means to promote social change and a mode to stimulate both critical consciousness and transformative social action.

Writing, poetry, and activism

Brand has reconciled intellectual and physical forms of activism, insofar as her resistance writing and the organisation of protest in the street, or "outside the House of Parliament," to represent disparate approaches to the spectrum of practice and efficacy. "I don't want to propose being a writer as some elevated act of activism, because it isn't," Brand notes. "There is that tendency, simply because writing is seen as intellectual activity and, in this society, intellectual activity takes hierarchical power over actual activity, the real and the physical" (Wanyeki et al. 20). Brand's commitment to intellectual work as a means to oppose hegemony, joined with her eight-month effort in Grenada with the Agency for Rural Transformation (prior to the October, 1983, U.S. invasion), underscores her regard for activism in both forms.[4] "So finally," Brand reveals, "I've understood that there isn't really a struggle between writing and activism if the project is the same. I just don't want to fall into the trap of starting to believe that my work was much more important than any kind of organizing outside the House of Parliament."

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[4] In 1983, Brand travelled to Grenada under the auspices of Canadian Universities' Service Overseas (CUSO).

The poem that opens *Epigrams to Ernesto Cardenal in Defense of Claudia* exhibits a determination to combine physical activism with poetic expression;[5] it also highlights the indivisibility of idiosyncratic interests from all aspects of oppositional practice:

> I've handed out leaflets at subway stations
> crying death to the murdering policemen,
> I'm sure the RCMP has my name, my picture,
> my letters and now my poems.
> You don't even return my calls! (*EEC* 21)

The customary and repetitive routines of physical demonstration are bound, here, to the act of *naming* perpetrators of injustice and, crucially, death. The poem's twofold call for action and retribution is broadcast even as the speaker acknowledges the ominous capacity of the state to amass private information, to document one's profile, to seize personal articulations of socio-political dissent in the form of "letters and now my poems." Not just "poems," mind, but "*my* poems" (my emphasis)—poems, one surmises, that speak the truth about social wrongs—which are "something dangerous and honest." What is more, in this process of social struggle the female speaker finds herself abandoned by Cardenal who the poem indicates is an intimate familiar and political collaborator.

In *Epigrams to Ernesto Cardenal*, the speaker castigates Cardenal's mistreatment of poetry as (in this instance) an intellectual-tidbit, or an emotional, expressive indulgence. Epigram 33 underscores the potential of poetic expression to perform social work when the form is employed in elemental, political expression:

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[5] Born in Nicaragua in 1925, Ernesto Cardenal is a Roman Catholic priest, revolutionary, Marxist, and poet; he served in Nicaragua's Ministry of Culture from 1979 to 1988.

> Ars Poetica
>
> Yes, but what else was done
> except the writing of calming lines
> except sitting in artsy cafes
> talking artsy talk.
> what else …
> ....
> except tonal voices, bellicose sermons,
> self-indulgent dulcimer expurgations
> about fathers and women
> what else was done, except
> a disembodied anxiety, anger unable
> to find a table to bang or a door to slam
> what when the chance to speak is only taken
> when it is not necessary, past,
> what when the chance is lost,
> what when only doodlings mark a great stone
> visits to the asylum mark a great poet
> and freedom is personal
> yes what then was done except a poser
> worse, a mole has infiltrated poems. (*EEC* 29–30)

The speaker implies that Cardenal, or any author who panders to romanticism and "artsy" self-absorption without committing to verse's potential for potent socio-political synthesis, misses the driving social energy within poetry, the necessity of poetry to claim a speaking voice for those who remain unheard. The impatience and disdain of the speaker for the authorial "poser" implicate poetry in a galvanizing, almost sacrosanct process of articulation bound to the material world. The anaphoric "what else was done" implicates the need for, or the absence of, a combination of physical action and poetic commitment.

Consistent with Brand's involvement with activism, the *Epigrams to Ernesto Cardenal* lay claim, resolutely, to women's participation in political action. Roger McTair notes this in the volume's introduction:

> Cardenal's epigrams to Claudia are poems of love, loss and politics. Poems of a passionate and conscious person in love with a capricious being.
>
> Brand's response, in defense of Claudia, are poems of love and politics from a feminist and dialectical stand. Brand's Claudia is a thinking woman, as opposed to the flighty bourgeois that has enthralled Cardenal. (Introduction)

Not surprisingly, then, at least a few of the epigrams balk at patriarchy's and feminism's audacious and deprecating assessment of the Black female speaker, of her potential to contribute physically (on the front line) but not intellectually, in a substantive manner, to oppositional skirmishes. Take, for example, Epigram 14,

> so we spend hours and hours
> learning Marx,
> so we picketed embassies and stood
> at rallies,
> so it's been 13 years of agitating
> for the liberation of Africa,
> so they still think, I should be in charge
> of the refreshments (*EEC* 24)

and Epigram 47,

> you say you want me to…
> to what?
> no I can't tap dance
> at the International Women's Day rally (*EEC* 35)

> [I] am thus led to involve myself in the relationship, both by desiring in my turn the seducee and (as a consequence of this desire) by identifying mimetically with the seducer-figure. But equally, one does not only desire to love, but also to be loved; and this is the principle of readerly identification with the seducee/narratee. Again, mimetic activity is involved…. (31)

Although the dynamic that characterizes the reader, seducer, and seducee trio would appear, on the face of it, to be one of rivalry, Chambers points to Girard's conception of rivalry as neither mere envy nor antagonism; conversely, "*rivalry* is a principle of identification, involvement with the other, and assimilation" (31). Consequently, a reader assumes a mediating position as one linked to narrator and narratee in a mode of mimetic desire; nonetheless, she retains a degree of separation from the text in the role of *tiers exclu*. It is in this simultaneous occupation of outsider/insider status that one discovers the room for manoeuvre of which Chambers speaks: in sum, one becomes the reading subject who effectively makes of a text a dynamic, discursive process—one reliant upon interpretation to emancipate the text from its sterile "narrative function." In this framework, the "role a reader of a text [assumes] is not so much to receive a story … as to *collaborate with the text in the production of meaning*," one effect of which is the dissolution of "the simplistic distinctions between self and other, sender and receiver that are inherent in the concepts of narrator and narratee," concludes Chambers (emphasis added, 26).

Fiction as Genre

Fertile dialectical ground exists in this conception of reading as an exercise in readerly collaboration with the text. Ideally, an author's investment in the psychic potential of her characters enables them to breach the text-bound constraints of fiction and thus enter into the consciousnesses of a range of readers. In this way, Brand invites individual identification with—and across—the matrix of narratives that her fictions articulate. Within a community of readership, then, fictions signify an opportunistic forum wherein the classification and comparison of individual experiences are encouraged, even inevitable; as this comparison transpires, the possibility exists for the elucidation and refinement of race-, gender- and class-based consciousness, thereby contributing to a collaborative critical analysis of hegemonic conditions. The success and thoroughgoing nature of any such shift in consciousness, it should be acknowledged, is inevitably a conditional one: the openness or disinclination of the reader to inhabit an altered perspective inexorably intersects with that reader's founding beliefs and the forces that have wrought that reader's particular subjectivity.

In the provisional collapse of "simplistic distinctions" that Chambers sketches, a framework is laid for readerly identification with the motivations and desires of characters previously judged incompatible, alien, perhaps antithetical. Newly accessible through fiction, the desires of the other become not only plausible, but also compulsions with which a reader might empathize. Chambers reasons thus:

> [I]f narrative texts have the power to change their readers, it is because one cannot unbecome what one has once become, unthink, unfeel, or undesire what one has once thought, felt, or desired. To be seduced by a text—to identify with textual

> relations that exclude one as, by definition[,] different—must logically, therefore, produce *change*, change being understood as *becoming less different* from the textual concerns than one once was. In this sense, reading can be defined as the movement whereby the *tiers exclu* tends to be realized as a *tertius gaudens*. (32)

With the provisional (re)alignment of perhaps disparate desires, and the overlap discovered in unfamiliar cognitive maps, the lines of familiar or previously unconsidered boundaries are not so much redrawn as they are perforated, scored by the power of counterhegemonic discourse. "Desires can be changed because they are mediated by power," writes Chambers: "being mediated, they are subject to the operations of appropriation and seduction—operations that are not exploitative or violent *when their effect is maieutic*, and *when the deflection of desire results from a self-education*, an awareness of the damage done, to ourselves and to others, by the desires that are controlled by [hegemonic] power" (emphasis added, 232).

Specifically, then, reading fiction that engages with the complex representation of the other functions as a medium for "self-education" and the development of critical self-consciousness. The educative process is identifiable as such insofar as a given reader's interpolated ideological apparatus—whether hegemonic, subaltern, or something in between—runs up against the slightly skewed or entirely contrary desires of the fictional others that a text represents. Alternatively, as I have suggested, and key to the organic intellectual project of developing critical and collective consciousness, the other meets itself in contextualizing discourse. The implication of Chambers' analysis is that readers who have the least in common with the narratives they explore are most apt to benefit from the expanded horizon of provisional identification as they come to inhabit the subjectivity of *tertius gaudens*—providing, of course, that those readers are committed "to collaborate with the text in the production of meaning."

As I proposed in the Introduction, the identification of an oppressed peasant class in need of collective representation was, for Gramsci, relatively straightforward, since many were organized within general categories of employment and associated syndicates. For Brand, a substantial component of building collective consciousness is dependent upon consolidating initially diffuse understandings of basic collectivity. The flip side to Chambers' thesis, then, from the perspective of the organic intellectual, is that subalterns, or those who find themselves most disenfranchised within hegemonic socio-economic structures (*tiers exclu*), stand to gain from access to an otherwise elusive matrix of articulation and self-recognition. More fundamentally, however, a disenfranchised and perhaps isolated individual stands to gain from her collaboration with a discovered community in the maieutic deconstruction of dominant structures of meaning that frame their exclusion.

Brand's fiction provides a material framework—the community of the text—within which readers can dwell: the figurative and literate house of the other. In line with the process Chambers elaborates, fiction enables the reader to disengage from familiar, naturalized constructs of self, common sense, and social order; at the same moment, fiction encourages the reader to involve him- or herself with the other: to explore untried perspectives and positionality, to inhabit an alternate subjectivity. The genre of fiction is ideally suited to make available the type of enduring, extended narrative experience that is required by a reader to achieve a lasting and intense immersion in an other's subjectivity. Even if such immersion is undertaken for purely voyeuristic purposes,

> That saddle of children given you by one man then
> another, the bear and darn and mend of your vagina
> she like to walk about plenty, Ben said, she was a
> small woman, small small. I chase Ben's romance as
> it mumbles to a close, then, the rum and cocunut
> water of his eyes as he prepares to lie gently for his
> own redemption. I was she favourite, oh yes.
> The ric rac running of your story remains braided in
> other wars, Liney, no one is interested in telling the
> truth. History will only hear you if you give birth to a
> woman who smoothes starched linen in the wardrobe
> drawer, trembles when she walks and who gives birth
> to another woman who cries near a river and
> vanishes and who gives birth to a woman who is
> a poet, and, even then. (*NLN* 26)

Oblivious to the significance of Liney's diminutive size with respect to the many children she bore, Ben is also heedless of the progression of more-or-less transient men that passed through, leaving those children and the care they required behind. Liney's story wrestles to the surface of Ben's "braided" narrative, but only just: his account is one told primarily to gratify his personal "romance" of the past, and he is seemingly unaware of the underlying implications of the key incidents or trials of Liney's daily life. Only a fortuitous chain of births, happenstance, and potentialities ultimately result in an at-best-insubstantial gleaning and transmission of Liney's reality. Brand's closing caveat, "even then," stands in synecdochically for the dodgy struggle to endure that Black women's narratives must survive if they are to emerge into public consciousness, particularly if champions of women's herstory are few and far between.

All discourse exerts influence over the tales it fosters and those it discounts. *No Language Is Neutral* manifests Brand's considerable investment in sustaining women's herstoriography, as the stories of woman after woman emerge in this collection: "Phyllis"

(11–13), "Jackie" (14), "Amelia" (16), "Mammy Prater," who endures for 115 years to have her photograph taken (17–19),[7] "Liney" (24–26), Brand's mother (27), a Caribbean immigrant to Toronto, "Pearl" (30), and Brand herself. Brand's drive to focus on women's lives issues from at least two sources. The first of these is a desire to represent the women whose struggles she has witnessed—first as a child in Trinidad, and later in Toronto: women responsible for each other, their families, and communities.

This thematic focus on the details of women's negotiation for the survival of family, and the clash of the individual with social imperatives, surfaces also in "Dialectics," a poem that details Brand's reflections on her aunts in Trinidad and the considerable impact their examples had upon her (*LLO* 51–69). In interview, Brand conveys to Frank Birbalsingh the influence that the examples of her aunts had upon her interest in commenting on "the ways in which we are made to live by the social structure": "My aunts had big loud laughs. I am not saying that they conquered life, or that life was beautiful for them or anything; but I saw them wrestle with it, and I wanted to describe that wrestling" (134). Brand takes pains to make clear to Birbalsingh that her aunts' wrestling did not mean they were free from constraints: "Although that was a sign of resilience and forbearance and strength, it wasn't a sign of power. That's what they were missing. They could forbear, uphold, or be strong; they could try to find ways out of their difficult situation, and control their internal lives; but the power to absolutely burst out of that wasn't there" (134). Brand's great-grandmother and aunts provide examples of resilient, resourceful women who faced the hardships inflicted upon them by unreliable men and economic privation; they faced hardships and endured them, but not without physical and emotional costs to themselves. Brand refuses to cloak this reality within a mythology of matriarchy that represents Black women's wisdom and social allegiance as power sufficient to offset the hardships they and their families endure.[8]

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[7] For a meticulous discussion of this poem, see Diana Brydon's "Reading Dionne Brand's 'Blues Spiritual for Mammy Prater,'" *Inside the Poem: Essays and Poems in Honour of Donald Stephens*, ed. W. H. New (Toronto: Oxford UP, 1992) : 81–87.

Poetry and fiction by Brand offset, in part, the distortion and elision of the familial, social, and economic centrality of women in the Caribbean, a feature male-authored literature of the region often disregards. This counterbalance—the provision of a corrective, alternative representation of women—is an issue central to Brand's work. Of "West Indian literature in general," she observes, "[i]t's not just dominated by male writers but dominated by themselves as subjects in it, *despite the evidence of their own lives*. Many people grew up in families like mine. The image of one of my aunts, one kid on her arm, one at her waist and one at her dress-tail was an image that I will always see…. that image will always guide me in some way" (Birbalsingh 133, my emphasis).[9] The male-authored portrayals of women in Caribbean literature, and in social discourses, often stand in radical juxtaposition with Brand's quotidian experience of women as mainstays of familial survival and social cohesion. This recovery of narrative is a feature of her participation in a distinct discourse in poetry and fiction that, in the words of Frederick Ivor Case, advances a " knowledge of the self, consciousness, solidarity, affirmation of woman and womanhood, and [a] confidence in the vision of the world" that Brand's work promotes (58).[10]

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[8] Writing in 1984, in "A Working Paper on Black Women in Toronto: Gender, Race and Class," Brand scorns the popular "reification of the 'strong Black woman.'" She comments:

> This "strong Black woman" is trotted out by all sides, on various occasions, to repeat Sojourner Truth's speeches, to be the exemplar of patient motherhood/secret sexuality, and generally, to mannequin the role of deepest sufferer/strongest back. Thus, from within and without the [Black] community, the reality of Black women is systematically suppressed and evaded. (27)

[9] See Brand's comments on the nature of male Caribbean authors' portrayal of female characters in "This Body for Itself" (*BOS* 91–110), particularly 98–99; Brand also provides a survey of select female Caribbean author's treatment of female characters (99–107).

Lesbian consciousness and "a derisive kind of eye"

In discussion with Makeda Silvera, Brand affirms her work as distinguishable from that of other female authors—even those identified with leftist and/or feminist perspectives and politics—as a result of her lesbianism. Brand reasons that as a lesbian her "position vis-à-vis being a woman" ("In the Company" 358) differs from that of other women and thus empowers her, perhaps compels her, to regard with a more meticulous scepticism the constructs of "woman" and womanhood. Attuned to her great-grandmother's crucial influence, Brand remarks on her poems about Liney that they focus "not just with her difficulties but with her departures from male life, departures from where men had a role in defining her. What I saw in her life were those departures." One objective of her work, Brand claims, is "about distancing myself as a *human being* from concepts or constructs of womanhood that are laid down largely through the rule of men" (358–59, my emphasis).[11] These constructs are the offshoot of a patriarchal system that is, by the very nature of its investment in sustaining male privilege, disinclined to eradicate male impulses to instigate and sustain repressive interpretive and regulatory paradigms. Brand seems to suggest that by means of cultivating "lesbian consciousness" (360) women can facilitate the generation of alternative discourses, "constructs of womanhood … laid down largely through the rule of" women.[12]

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[10] Frederick Ivor Case's article, "Babylon and the Spirit Lash," examines the poetic works of M. Nourbese Philip, Ramabai Espinet, and Claire Harris, in addition to those of Brand. Case reads the work of all four authors as contributions to a discourse that articulates values that challenge existing political, social, and economic priorities.

[11] With regard to the female body, Brand remarks: "For me the most radical strategy for the female body for itself is the lesbian body confessing all the desire and fascination for itself" (*BOS* 108).

Grounded, then, in "lesbian consciousness," Brand promotes an alternative subjectivity and ideology for women founded upon values and paradigms *distinct* from those asserted either by patriarchy (at large), or locally enforced male constructs of woman. However, the Gordian knot one must negotiate when seeking to generate such a distinction between male and female communities that currently rely upon and operate through mutual—albeit non-egalitarian—social, economic, and political systems is that that distinction is simply prohibitive, unless one seriously considers, as an option, the segregation of men and women along distinct sex lines. The virtual and pragmatic impossibility of such a practice aside, it is nonetheless instructive to examine the implications of Brand's use of the term "human being."

The phrase Brand chooses in her discussion with Silvera—"distancing myself as a human being"—is problematic in its implication that one can step cleanly out of one construct, managed "largely through the rule of men," and into another seemingly unbounded category, that of "human being." This manoeuvre, were it possible, would depend upon Brand's ability to escape the specificities of her gender in order to locate the some kind of pre-ideological, pre-linguistic subjectivity. Nonetheless, to give Brand the benefit of the doubt, there is considerable appeal to this utopic notion of a site beyond the contaminating reach of patriarchy and other oppressive hegemonic forces.

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[12] Brand doesn't appear to consider how men who align themselves with feminist aims and politics might benefit from or play a part in "lesbian consciousness" as a liberating philosophy. No doubt she would consider this reckoning the responsibility of the men themselves.

In another context, in which she comments explicitly on doing away with race and class, Brand speaks about the role of her work in reaching for, and generating, such ideals. She avers: "I think that at the moral core, if you want, of my work, is *that* idea: the idea of a kind of human space which is empty of racism and race, which is empty of class oppression. I still think the work is generated around that idea" (Personal interview). In light of the fact that Brand's work takes great pains to illuminate the sinister morass that defines and polices the nexus of race, class, sexuality, and gender, it is practical to assert that this "idea of a kind of human space which is empty of racism … [and] class oppression" must also, for consistency's sake, "empty" itself of gender or sexuality. If, as Brand contends, a poet is "someone who advocates, vigorously, living in a great way," it stands to reason that a poet's advocacy must hold considerable currency in imagination in order to imagine something better.[13] The essence of Brand's avowed identification with the intangible subjectivity of the "human being" represents, in fact, the reclamation of a larger ideal, a more cohesive social whole, unfragmented by the managing divisions authored by hegemony in the name of sustaining capitalism, patriarchy, and imperialism.

In the spirit of advocacy, Brand's "sense-making" kind of poetry functions as an activist-imagining of the revocation of social borders, instigating the transgression and undermining of binaries even as it names those divisions. This process of deconstructing ideologically normalized paradigms resonates with Paula Rabinowitz's observations on the documentary form, cited in Chapter 1: "radical documentary constructs objects of radical desire: it depicts the subject and object of revolution to itself and through itself, producing an identity that both includes yet differs from its audience. This is a highly personal form which takes as its subject public affairs; but it is also a political practice which comes from private vision" (12). Brand concedes this dual purpose of her poetry in conversation with Silvera:

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[13] Note that imagination should not be confused with fantasy, a creative genre Brand has little interest in, as she remarks to Beverly Daurio: "Ordinarily, people think fantasy is more interesting. I guess I find reality more interesting" ("Writing It" 38).

> My poems have always been poems that document something social, something historic, so there has been a mix of documentary poems and at times more lyrical poems. Finally, I came to the point in *No Language* where I could do those two things together. In some ways I'd always thought: this subject documentary, this subject lyrical. I think what I did in *No Language* was to mix the lyricism with the documentary. ("In the Company" 366)

The admixture of the so-called "documentary" and "lyrical" in poetry goes to the creation of a novel standard of articulating race, gender, sexuality, and class in a manner that takes as its subject the expression of their social interface. The question remains, however: how does Brand accomplish this innovative tactic? The answer lies, in part, in her mingling of Received Standard English with Trinidadian language, a method by which she generates a dialogic form of expression that, on the one hand, takes into account (and challenges) the hard-line binaries traditionally encoded in Received Standard and, on the other hand, flouts the functional and ideological restraints homeland social discourses impose on the transgression of those same categories of race, class, gender, and sexuality.

The language is the model

In her article "'I Am Blackening in My Way': Identity and Place in Dionne Brand's *No Language Is Neutral*," Teresa Zackodnik draws from Mikhail Bakhtin's work on the dialogic and heteroglot nature of language. She does so to explore Brand's fashioning of a new amalgam of linguistic expression appropriate to her liminal subject position, situated imperfectly between the Caribbean and Canada. Zackodnik's focus turns initially to the othering effected by Received Standard English instruction in England's Caribbean (post)colony school system, particularly as English was applied as an educational technology to proscribe ideological variance by promoting linguistic homogeneity. The negating, disempowering effect of imposed, school-taught standard English—"a language," described by Marlene Nourbese Philip, as "not only experientially foreign, but also etymologically hostile[,] and expressive of the non-being of the African"—inevitably collides with the features of nation language that are bound intimately to locus, local cultural practices, and nuanced linguistic traits (qtd. in Zackodnik 195).

In order to not merely subsist, Brand—Black in a white, Anglo-based school system; descendent of slaves in an English colony; female in a patriarchal society; and, eventually, lover of women in a misogynist culture—needed to engender a language that could provide her with the "kind of sense-making" that would define a space in which the multiple categories of her subjectivity could coexist. This undertaking secures the means to tether a chorus of "intangible[s]" and arrive at "a certain sanity."

Zackodnik points to a number of passages in Brand's "no language is neutral" that highlight areas in which individual rights and subjectivities clash with prevailing ideologies. These points of conflict include: one's "experience as a woman of colour … in a world colonized by white male sameness" (198); the role of standard English and Trinidadian language in "dehumanizing and muting … black women" (198); femininity imposed in the Caribbean, and racial alienation in Canada (199); and the needs of the poem's speaker, and her lover, to "disrupt and challenge the unity of heterosexist society with their lesbian presence and relationship" (199–200). In all of these instances, "a certain sanity," of which Brand speaks, is made possible only through the generation of a new heteroglot language, a hybrid (or mongrel) mixture of Received Standard and nation language. The amalgam is necessary because neither language, individually, is sufficiently "neutral" ideologically to serve as an authenticating voice for the experience of the poem's speaker.

Combined, the two appropriated languages forge a viable, pragmatic mode of expression. Zackodnik writes, "Brand does not locate this new language outside, nor as a negotiation between, nation language and standard English: the contact of the two languages best approximates her experience" (201). As a consequence of the othering imposed on her by the languages of her milieu, which negate her race and her status in Canada as an immigrant, "Brand's search for a new language, then, is [also] partly motivated by the hostility that she has experienced toward her identity and existence as a lesbian of colour, a hostility invested in the etymology and use of both standard English and nation language, which have rendered her so invisible as to be nonexistent" (201). Brand's forging of a multi-layered language inserts and mediates her presence in those discourses.

Both epigrams challenge the sexist expectations Black women confronted in their participation with the Black Power movement of the 1970s, and the racism that inflected participation in the Women's movement of the same era. These subjects, among others, lie at the heart of Brand's *Sisters in the Struggle* documentary. Epigram 14 unveils its ironic disclosure in a dismissive narrative twist in the last two lines: the rhythmic pulse of the recurrent "so we," paired with the arduous, importunate tasks of oppositional labour that the poem centres on—again, intellectual and physical—establishes a pattern of association that would appear to foreshadow some comparable responsibility, particularly as the unidentified mission is heralded by the edict, "I should be in charge." Significantly, a line break precedes the kernel of following but requisite information—a structural pattern present in much of Brand's poetry: it at once postpones closure and simultaneously draws the reader's attention onward. Brand's use of this technique generates a readerly expectation of disclosure, but one that is momentarily eclipsed by the pause of the eye's transit between lines on the page. This is a kind of punch-line poetry, in which the unexpected blow assaults the speaker's competency and equality.

The new communication of Black women's narratives

Not surprisingly, Brand's poetry articulates and elicits stories specific to women involved, on the one hand, in the labour and intelligence of revolutionary struggle and, on the other, the struggle of the everyday. Among other endeavours, the poems of *No Language Is Neutral* endorse and advance the communication of women's narratives. The anaphoric phrase "this is you girl," which initiates the six segments of "hard against the soul," is a declaration that names and claims the geography, herstory, and subjectivity of a woman's previously untold narrative:

> this is you girl, something never waning or forgetting
> something hard against the soul
> this is where you make sense, that the sight becomes
> tender, the night air human, the dull silence full
> chattering, volcanoes cease, and to be awake is
> more lovely than dreams (*NLN* 7)

The poem pays tribute to private, individual endurance under constraints that abrade the soul—that is, social imperatives forged within a history of colonialism and slavery that trouble acceptance of ubiety, of history unified with location, of sexuality. The poem prompts acknowledgement of precisely these elements that enable the evolution, and underscore the significance, of personal development and concomitant epistemology: "this is *where* you *make sense*" (my emphasis). Reclamation of this herstorical kernel renders "the dull silence full," and subdues the otherwise imperious "volcanoes" of narrative that endeavour to fill up silence with the stories of others.

In *No Language Is Neutral,* an eponymous poem for Phyllis Coard is footnoted with a dedication that identifies her, matter-of-factly, as "*Minister of Women's Affairs in the People's Revolutionary Gov't. of Grenada, 1979–1983*" (11). This coda, which bears witness to and publicizes Coard's incarceration "*at Richmond Hill Prison in Grenada for her role in a coup,*" is a commemoration like that attached to the succeeding poem for Jacqueline Creft:[6] both affirm in concrete terms the pivotal role of particular women in

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[6] Brand's tribute to "Jackie" reads:

For Jacqueline Creft
Minister of Education in the People's Revolutionary

specific historical events and, too, the very real sacrifices these women have made in consequence.

Each of the three sections of "Phyllis" comprises is bisected by Brand's iteration of the threat and persecution that Coard confronts, particular to her gender: "I know they treat you bad / like a woman" (11, 12, 13). The prisons' guards and soldiers berate Coard for the 'un-womanly' nature of her participation in the revolutionary government:

> [they] called you hyena, a name enjoining
> you alone to biology and not science,
> you should have known
> the first thing they would jump on
> was the skill of your womb (*NLN* 12)

That Coard is coupled with "biology" rather than "science" indicates the guards' prescriptive estimation of Coard as responding merely from some characteristically vague life impulse in lieu of rational and disciplined defiance of unjust conditions; the equation repudiates Coard as a person able to grasp and invest in the necessity of armed rebellion against the oppressive structures that previously governed the Grenadian populace and have since reclaimed it. Coard's personal convictions and resistance, despite the abusive conditions of her captivity, become the subject of a public, if suppressed, narration:

> Phyllis, they said you defied the prison guards
> and talked through their shouts to be quiet
> your laugh clanging against the stone walls
> your look silencing the soldiers. (*NLN* 13)

> *Gov't* [sic] *of Grenada, killed on October 19th, 1983*
> *during a coup.* (14)

Coard refuses to be stifled by her captors and thus becomes an exemplar of rebellion, subversion, and individual courage—a model publicly accessible, at least by way of narrative and rumour, to people receptive to her example. By her actions, "talk[ing] through their shouts to be quiet," Coard becomes an exemplar in the broadcast and reclamation of a perspective that represents the values and priorities of a socially conscious but economically disenfranchised population. The articulation and projection of Black women's narratives is an ongoing project that aims, Brand asserts in *No Burden to Carry*, "to recover Black women as historical actors … not only to clarify the historical record but ultimately to recover a revolutionary method for feminist struggle and Black struggle" (13). As the Minister of Women's Affairs in revolutionary Grenada, and as an unswerving combatant, Coard, too, embodies the physical and intellectual struggle of oppositional labour and praxis.

Family stories

The complexity of recovering *one* woman's herstory is not a simple one, even when the woman in question is family. The poems of *No Language Is Neutral* seek out those narratives and defy their subordination, when necessary, to the tales of the men who tell them. This is one theme visited by the extended series of prose poems "no language is neutral." In the third segment of the poem, Brand endorses the impulse to revisit the past in order to locate oneself in the present. She writes of her great-grandmother's story:

> When Liney reach here is up to the time I hear about.
> Why I always have to go back to that old woman who
> wasn't even from here but from another barracoon, I
> never understand but deeply as if is something that
> have no end. Even she daughter didn't know but only

leave me she life like a brown stone to see. (*NLN* 24)

Not every woman, nor every poet, feels compelled to revisit and revitalize past generations. Brand writes, however, that "every Black poet must return to come forward, must break the vision of us which we did not make, must witness … must reclaim history" (Rev. of *Translation* 224). Despite separation interposed by epoch, time, and individual perspective, the poem's speaker looks backward to unearth the buried details, the essence of Liney, so as to reconstitute—but *anew*—a subject differentiated from the colonizers' History, and from men's history:

> …your autobiography now between my stories
> and the time I have to remember and the passages
> that I too take out of liking, between me and history
> we have made a patch of it, a verse still missing you
> at the subject…. (*NLN* 26)

The provisional and exploratory work of poetry is, then, to imagine "a patch" for history, either conjured or intuited: something necessary but inevitably partial and makeshift.

In order to fabricate that "patch," Brand and her younger sister rummage for information about their great-grandmother—petition their ninety-year-old uncle Ben "to tell we any story he / remember" (*NLN* 25). As Ben ruminates, however, it becomes evident that Liney will surface only as memory "smiled on his gold teeth," "in between his own trail of conquests / and pretty clothes." The key events of Liney's life, as the ancient Ben transmits them, suffer from a paucity of detail. More unfortunate is the misplaced emphasis imposed on her story, which arises out of Ben's positively male, egocentric perception of his mother's life. Brand intuits an alternative, gynocentric reading to ameliorate some of the blind spots that blot Ben's account of Liney:

impossibility of escape from boundaries of languages, and the ideological systems languages convey and constitute, she nevertheless seeks in "no language is neutral" to locate that linguistic middle ground:

> In another place, not here, a woman might touch
> something between beauty and nowhere, back there
> and here, might pass hand over hand her own
> trembling life, but I have tried to imagine a sea not
> bleeding, a girl's glance full as a verse, a woman
> growing old and never crying to a radio hissing of a
> black boy's murder. I have tried to keep my throat
> gurgling like a bird's. (*NLN* 34)

This place, neither here nor there, is perhaps unattainable except in the imagination. The passage implies an indeterminate space in which a Black woman can explore her own history, her own being in process. As a Black woman, however, one cannot carry out such exploration, Brand suggests, without at the same moment contemplating a history of slavery, the probability of unrealized potential, the enduring fact of historical injustice, and the likelihood of imminent prejudice. As such a woman, of course, Brand has tried to keep her voice tuned to that which also provides beauty. Then again, beauty is ineluctably bound to material conditions. Poetry, therefore, provides a means to elaborate on those conditions: to name them, synthesize them, and present a method of "sense-making" that derives from the experience of intrepid clarity which Brand points to in the title poem of *'Fore Day Morning*:

> 'fore day morning
> if you see me walking
> where the sky meets the road,
> where Che and Josina fell,
> come, go with me,
> we will tell each other no lies,

> we will be frightened. (7)

Here, where "sky meets the road," not only must ideals come to ground, and frank honesty confront its vulnerability and fears, but hope for change will only find form in the relentless, exact, truthful, and loving articulation of the challenges that must be confronted. The language of that articulation is tightly bound to subjectivity:

> What I say in any language is told in faultless
> knowledge of skin, in drunkenness and weeping,
> told as a woman without matches and tinder, not in
> words and in words and in words learned by heart,
> told in secret and not in secret, and listen, does not
> burn out or waste and is plenty and pitiless and loves. (*NLN* 34)

Subjectivity invests experience with language and the particularities of its cadence, a vocabulary of locus and engagement; it withholds knowledge of some words while others are ground "hard against the soul" into an impossibility of forgetting (*NLN* 7). The poem's reference to expression "not in / words and in words and in words learned by heart" implicates the necessary negotiation of the felt, the familiar, and the not-yet known in order to arrive at a new mode of expression. Brand's lines resonate with the moral conviction of her commitment to "tell each other no lies" and this way reassures the reader of her stamina, vehemence, and her passion for her project.

Generic constraints: "we will tell each other no lies"

Notwithstanding Brand's enthusiasm, I can think of two limitations that affect the role of poetry as an effectual medium for engendering social change. Both slow my endorsement of the genre as an expressive medium in Brand's stable of organic intellectual instruments. The first of these considerations pertains to the limited audience poetry garners, as a form, in Canada. A nominal popular readership hinders one from presupposing poetry's meaningful socio-political efficacy, a fact Brand acknowledges with regard to her own work and Canada's Black population. The second limitation is derivative of the first, insofar as the limited popular appeal of poetry renders its existence merely textual: that is to say, poetry can be a powerful mode of individual articulation and moral synthesis, but as a social catalyst poetry frequently remains inert, an individualistic aesthetic and expressive exercise, and thus is present in the world only as words on a page.

In response to a question I put to Brand about the disparateness of her audiences, in which I contrasted, as examples, the avid, seemingly predetermined spectators to which *Sisters in the Struggle* speaks directly, with the likely disinterested and uninformed "audience" comprising the children in Courtroom No. 1 in Toronto's courthouse on Jarvis Street (*MDR* 103–07), Brand posited a conceptual and intangible readership:

> [The] hearer that I think that I'm talking about there is not even identifiable … I can't say that that's the Black community. God, they hardly read my poetry, do you know what I mean? …so it isn't a set of physical people, or something: it's a kind of implied or intended listener, or hearer. And I sort of hesitate between hearer and listener because I doubt if anyone is listening (*laughter*). (Personal interview)

In a positive sense, this perspective opens up readership to include a wider range of accomplices in the reading community than do Brand's earlier pieces, works directed by specific address to particular target groups. "[T]he *idea*, [the] *possibility* of the *thing* you are trying to make," the social project one is engaged with, becomes the determining factor in who the work aims to include; for Brand, this incorporates "those who can hear that [larger idea], those who can visualize it some way or imagine it" (Personal interview). Development of a broader range of potential readers is certainly a practical turn in Brand's work, insofar as cultivating critical consciousness in a manner that includes different social groups is a pragmatic approach to generating more widespread resistance to hegemony's continuance. The challenge of drawing attention to the genre of poetry persists, however.

Poetry, though a form that has the capacity to transmit sensual intensity with sobering moral integrity, is, as I alluded at the beginning of this chapter, both blessed and cursed with features that make it the least commoditized art. Unlike film, for example, it is a genre that generally requires heightened cerebral concentration and a commitment to make meaning. The focus required by poetry is not only daunting to many, but fails to provoke sufficient interest to instigate or sustain widespread political mobilization in North America. Citing Nourbese Philip's observation in *A Genealogy of Resistance and Other Essays*—"[o]n the surface at least my work does not fit the traditions of Black poetry" (qtd. in Clarke 167)—George Elliot Clarke makes the point, regarding Philip, Brand, and Claire Harris, that "these so-called populist feminists often scribe erudite, densely allusive, unapologetically intellectual poems, employing fashionable poetic techniques, which is certainly their artistic right, but also equally certainly not populism" (167). This kind of poetry, it appears, is too spare and subtle an art—not just to capture public attention, but to spark the degree of intellectual *fascination* necessary, oftentimes, to unravel a poem's message, the ethical tenets and assertions embedded in multi-layered language.

In her breakdown of the final verse paragraph of "no language is neutral," Lisa Robertson astutely distils the dilemma of the poem's call for dedicated readerly meditation: "These lines ask us to enter into irreducible complexity as a form of attention" ("How Poems Work" D18). I will wager that by and large "irreducible complexity" is not, by nature, the sort of solace most individuals seek out after a shift on the shop floor, nor is it the kind of escape yearned for after a day or week at the office. The lean narrative of poetry "kind of trips you to more interesting, much deeper ways of speaking" (Personal interview), Brand muses, and while this sounds like an ideal process for clarifying thought, for "sense-making," it contrasts markedly with the mechanics of popular culture. The latter functions by means of the economy, even inhibition, of thought, much like hegemonic, common-sense models of race, gender, and class mobilize essentialist paradigms to legitimate "simplified" social organization. The focus and complex thought often required by poetry must contend with a well-entrenched system of distractions that discourage reflection and deliberation.

Brand portrays poetry as a kind of spiritual transcendentalism when she proposes that it represents "the perfect expression of your breath, your singular breath, at the same moment as it joins you to all other breathing" (Tihanyi 8); she acknowledges, too, "it's a better way for me of speaking. In some ways it allows more to happen" (Personal interview). To claim poetry is a credible, revolutionary medium and motivator, however, is something even Brand would hesitate to assert. In contrast with prose, she implies, poetry positions the writer and the work in a kind of splendid isolation: "there's a way in which you don't have to pay attention to anyone when you write poetry (*laughter*); you don't have to pay attention to anyone. But there's a way in which the reader is *compelling*, the reader has a compelling presence in prose, and that doesn't happen in poetry" (Personal interview). Perhaps the qualities that free poetry to function as an intensely personal expression of one's interface with the material world can be said, too, to be the qualities that remove it from popular accessibility.

Aware of the peculiar relationship between her activist project and writing poetry—the fecund potential, but also the generic limitations of the form that sustains her—Brand broaches this theme in the final section of her poem "Anti-poetry":

> Some one at a party
> drew me aside to tell me a lie
> about my poems,
> they said "you write well,
> your use of language is remarkable"
> Well if that was true, hell
> would break loose by now,
> colonies and fascist states would fall,
> housework would be banned,
> pregnant women would walk naked in the streets,
> men would stay home at night, cowering.
> whoever it was, this trickster,
> I wish they'd keep their damn lies
> to themselves. (*CHS* 33)

By way of explaining this ironic reading of her poetry's inability to raze to the ground the world's various socio-economic and -political disparities, and in poking fun at her unrealistic expectation that it could do so, Brand remarks of her poems to Birbalsingh,

> I put them forward as weapons. But I understand the failure of those weapons sometimes. I understand the vulnerability involved in that weaponry. But I also know that people don't like where they are now.... I'm not underestimating the

> weight, breadth and brutality of the American system; but it has cracks, and we have a responsibility to keep looking for those cracks. (Birbalsingh 129)

These comments reveal a degree of levity and bemusement, while at the same moment they reiterate the commitment to ongoing, tactical, and ideological opposition to U.S. incursions against practices of political self-determination that threaten the status quo.

Since the U.S. crushed popular, democratic social change in Grenada in 1983, *Land to Light On* is the first sustained work by Brand to articulate the dreadful impact of that blow to her spirit, her ideological and activist investment in turning the social and political tide against U.S. dominion. The poems of *Land to Light On* want for the humour or cheek of "Anti-poetry." They are emotionally affecting, even painful to read. In *Land To Light On*, Brand conveys a deep sense of her loss of direction and individual efficacy. She writes, in "I Have Been Losing Roads":

> I have to think again what it means that I am here,
> what it means that this, harsh as it is and without
> a name, can swallow me up. I have to think how I
> am here, so eaten up and frayed, a life that I was
> supposed to finish by making something of it
> not regularly made, where I am not this woman
> fastened to this ugly and disappointing world.
> I wanted it for me, to burst my brain and leap a distance
> and all I have are these hoarse words that still owe
> this life and all I'll be is tied to this century and waiting
> without a knife or courage and still these same words
> strapped to my back (*LLO* II ii, 9)

This is a raw and piercing lament over the inadequacy of poetry to alter historical events, beforehand or in the moment of their passing; even afterwards, Brand is bound to "these hoarse words that still owe / this life" a solution, redemption, or reimbursement. The redundant phrases "I have to think again" and "I have to think how" resonate with numb disbelief that no progress has been gained. The coffle of the last four lines, chained together by enervating *and*s, sap one's artistic and activist endurance and ingenuity. Brand is left with "these same words" because persuasion remains a project of language, not force, though the balance between the two is an awkward one. Lisa Robertson is correct, I believe, in her claim that Brand understands "the will to continue…. is not an accretion of power focused and exercised upon the other." Indeed, the prevention of this sort of coercion by hegemony's brutal lackey, military force, is what much of Brand's work is directed toward. "Rather," Robertson continues, the will is that which "quickens the register and resolve of perception as a meditative engagement with the world" (D18). To the organic intellectual committed to cultivating critical social consciousness, the application of, or coercion by, a force external to individual and collective consciousness is antithetical to social practice.

Brand's period of residence in central Ontario, which coincided with the writing of *Land to Light On*, provides a metaphorical portrait of the failure to engender unified critical consciousness:

> Out here, you can smell indifference driving
> along, the harsh harsh happiness of winter
> roads, all these roads heading nowhere, all
> these roads heading their own unknowing way,
> all these roads into smoke, and hoarfrost, friezed
> and scrambling off in drifts, where is this
> that they must go anytime, now, soon, immediately
> and gasping and ending and opening in snow dust.
> Quiet, quiet, earfuls, brittle, brittle ribs of ice
> and the road heaving under and the day lighting up,
> going on any way. (*LLO* II i, 8)

Again, the use of anaphora—"all these roads"—communicates a loss of focus and cohesion that the poem's latter half mimics in its rush of frenetic uncertainty, time and action: "anytime, now, soon, immediately / and gasping and ending and opening…." The sense of self-important—but ultimately unmanageable—urgency that the poem's many roads generate contrasts with the northern landscape's emptiness and indifference to human passage. This indifference infuses the first set of poems of *Land to Light On*. One can also read "the road heaving under and … / going on any way" as reflecting a human (because manmade) apathy toward events and overall circumstances: not only does the road go on without particular direction, it goes on *anyway*, regardless of external conditions.

Taking action, the process of "sense-making," is situated for Brand in reformulating language so as to address the demand for resourcefulness and initiative instigated by hegemony's constant obstruction of subaltern social agendas. Her search for expression during that period of residence in central Ontario is necessarily personal, though she hunts also for a means to communicate with others:

> I lift my head in the cold and I get confuse.
> It quiet here when is night, and is only me
> and the quiet. I try to say a word but it fall. Fall
> like the stony air. I stand up there but nothing
> happen, just a bank of air like a wall. I could swear
> my face was touching stone. I stand up but
> nothing happen, nothing happen or I shouldn't say
> nothing. I was embarrassed, standing like a fool,
> the pine burdened in snow, the air fresh, fresh
> and foreign and the sky so black and wide and I did not
> know which way to turn except to try again, to find
> some word that could be heard by the something
> waiting. My mouth could not find a language.
> I find myself instead, useless as that. I sorry.
> I stop by the mailbox and I give up. (*LLO* I iii, 5)

In her poetry, particularly from *No Language Is Neutral* onward, Brand's de facto claim to both languages proves an empowering tactic: she rejects the constraints they would impose upon her with their ideological baggage, but she does not deny their role in shaping her experience. "This is a necessary action, according to Bakhtin"—Zackodnik affirms—"in order to make language one's own." He writes:

> The word in language is half someone else's. It becomes "one's own" only when the speaker populates it with his own intention.... Prior to this moment of appropriation, the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language..., but rather it exists in other people's mouths, other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one's own. (qtd. in Zackodnik 202)

To suggest that forging this shared, multiparty space in language is a feat of the imagination is only half the tale. In *Pedagogy of Hope*, Paulo Freire insists "[i]magination and conjecture about a different world than the one of oppression, are as necessary to the praxis of historical 'subjects' (agents) in the process of transforming reality as it necessarily belongs to human toil that the worker or artisan first have in his or her head a design, a 'conjecture,' of what he or she is about to make" (39). It is in such conjecture that one begins to give voice and form to the possibility of a better life, a world different from "the one of oppression."

Brand's vision of a different world is, in fact, an admixture of her own and that of fellow poets. Brand speaks of writing *to* Aimé Césaire and Pablo Neruda, who represent, for her, "another level of audience." She remarks:

> When he [Neruda] writes about the Spanish Civil War in *Residence on Earth*, and that moment of feeling…talking about the house he used to live in, in Madrid, I think … that's what used to be: the camaraderie, the sense of a good life, or the sense of what a beautiful life might be. So that's my audience, that's what I'm writing to—that *idea*, that I'm writing to.[14] (Personal interview)

Brand certainly has a clear sense, or "conjecture," in Freire's word, of what a better world stands to and should embrace.

Cultivation of a multiparty space in language requires gutsy persistence, coupled with the refusal to submit to the inhibiting definitions that languages—because "ideologically saturated"—stand to impose on individual subjectivities (Bakhtin, qtd. in Zackodnik 197).[15] Insofar as Brand refashions two discourses to accommodate her own parameters of representation, this metamorphosis of languages serves to "empty" categories of differentiated race, gender, sexuality, and class. It does this by "filling in" precisely the constitutive, cohesive elements those discourses have been designed to negate: *human* Blackness, *human* femaleness, *human* lesbianism, and, counter to the ideology of capitalism, the reality of the *human* poor.

With allusions to the specific passages she attends to in "'I Am Blackening in My Way,'" Zackodnik assesses Brand's transformative engagement with language and the implications of that work in this way:

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[14] Brand's reference is, I believe, to Neruda's poem, "Explaining a Few Things" in *Residence on Earth and Other Poems*. (Trans. Angel Flores. Norfolk, CT: New Directions, 1946) 117, 119, 121.

[15] Zackodnik clarifies Bakhtin's use of this phrase: "He argues that when we speak of language, we must take 'language conceived as ideologically saturated, language as a world view, even as a concrete opinion, insuring a *maximum* of mutual understanding in all spheres of ideological life'" (197).

> Brand's 're-working' of the language that she uses asserts her racial identity as both the subject spoken in nation language and the colonized other spoken in standard English, her gender identity as neither ladylike nor boyish but beyond the heterosexual binary, and her sexual identity as invisible to nation language and standard English but voiced in the coalescence of both languages. Her racial, gender, and sexual identities are represented as self or other in different languages and different contexts; yet this division is privileged in her choice to invent a language from those that divide her. (203)

Brand cannot control how the juxtaposition of the differentiated binaries that remain encoded in the emergent heteroglossia will be interpreted. Nonetheless, she exercises authorial control over how those significations are set up so that they might play off one another and thus accentuate or play down what Henry Louis Gates calls the "double-voiced narrative mode" of "speakerly" texts (qtd. in Zackodnik n.6, 210; 205). Zackodnik posits the code-switching of Brand's speakerly poems as constitutive of a "contestational dialogue" (205),[16] one that "subverts the hierarchy that prioritizes standard English to achieve a new language in which she voices her subjectivity as polyvalent—not simply split between self and other but multiple" (206). The effect is the destabilization of discursive modes of reading the social world.

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[16] For a brief discussion of the implications of code-switching in Brand's *No Language Is Neutral*, see Maria Casas, "Codes as Identity: The Bilingual Representation of a Fragmented Literary Subject," (*Language and Discourse* 2 (1994)) : 54–61. In general, however, it can be observed that in the poems of *No Language Is Neutral*, particularly those of a historical bent, "Creole symbolises private, intuitive knowledge and family history; standard [English] symbolises public knowledge and the history written by the victors in the colonizing wars" (58).

In a teasingly comprehensive synthesis of the thematics and objectives of Canada's ethnic literatures, Barbara Godard articulates a persuasive reading in "From Visions of the Other to Theories of Difference: The Canadian Literatures." She writes:

> From their within-without positions, the writing of ethnic minorities troubles the homogeneity of the ethnocentrism of the singular discourse of power, works at its limits, on the margins, to interrogate its silences, absences, its politics of exclusion. It exposes boundaries, challenges the hierarchy of sites of discourse, forces the threshold and moves into the liminal, working the in-between, site of movement and change. The complexity of this double articulation arises from the fact that the discursive practices are both connected and disassociated: the logic of subject-identity that posits one subject for one discourse for one site or practice is confounded in this concept of a network of intersecting discourses where inside and outside are relational positions with respect to specific discourses not in subjection to a singular power. Through permutations and instabilities emerges the possibility of shifting the terms of the semiotic system itself, of conceptualizing an open system as a site of struggle rather than a closed system of binary oppositions organized on hierarchical lines that conceal the operations of power by naturalizing these differences as fact. (5)

Moving beyond the non-neutrality of language—that is, the incapacity of language to signify or label without simultaneously imposing (because ideologically saturated) a reductive grammar of essentialism—Brand forces her presence within and beyond the bounds of Received Standard, Trinidadian language, and their respective ideological frameworks, despite their divisions and elisions.

Penelope J. Englebrecht posits that "a lesbian metaphysic" exists among lesbian writers and that it serves to close the gap in the normally discontinuous ranking of subject and object, self and other. She writes, "a lesbian metaphysic … inscribes the inter/action of a lesbian Subject and a lesbian Other/self. These designations are inherently and constantly mutual—quite unlike the oppositional polarity of the patriarchal terms" (qtd. in Zackodnik 207). I take Englebrecht's proposal of "inherently and constantly mutual" designations to mean that the two subject positions are not only dialectically determined, but that they exist along a continuum of identification between self and other, the familiar and the indeterminate. In this respect, Englebrecht's conception of these dialectical subject positions resembles Chambers' reading of *tiers exclu* and *tertius gaudens*. The positive implications of this "lesbian metaphysic," distinct in many ways from Brand's "lesbian consciousness," I would suggest, is a bolstered sense of oneself as whole, cohesive, and as belonging—rather than existing in a manner that constantly requires psychic and practical accommodation of, and tactical resistance to, the kind of negation hegemony imposes on the other.[17]

Brand aims to identify within languages those spaces where the (self-)representation of alternative subjectivities, relatively independent of hegemonic determination, is possible. While the dialogic nature of Brand's poetry indicates the

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[17] The need for psychic accommodation and fortification is necessary, at some times, to all who feel disenfranchised when confronted with exclusion from dominant hierarchies, as Brand's comments about collecting interview data during the writing of *Rivers Have Sources* indicate. About the experience, she says, "our encounters with all those people, not just those of African descent, spoke to this lack of a presence, or the *feeling* of a presence. I remember one kid said to us, 'You know, I don't go into certain places like banks or big buildings because there's just a white feeling'" (Personal interview).

The sense of uselessness, regret, and even guilt that Brand expresses here is bound to her inability to forge a thoroughly redemptive and a revolutionary language, specifically one accessible to, and constructive for, a larger population's expectation, "the something waiting." In light of Brand's assertion that all of her work springs from poetry (Tihanyi 8), I suggest that poetry serves as a kind of staging area: it affords the intellectual catalyst, the sensuous touchstone, and the linguistic sounding board against which she tests and refines her ideas and agendas so they might realize the clarity they patently achieve in other forms.

The linguistic correlation between Brand's poetry and the other genres she works in is most evident, not surprisingly, in her fiction work. This is particularly true of *In Another Place, Not Here* and is evident in the language of Elizete, whose perceptions best exemplify the tonal nuances and the thoughtful lucidity of poetry.[18] Elizete is raised by Adela, a woman whose "great-great-great-ma" came to the Caribbean as a slave, and who, "when she done calculate the heart of this place, that it could not yield to her grief," refused to invest herself in the situation by naming nothing in it (*IAP* 18). Not the plants, not herself, nor her eight children. Elizete, however, must have language to fix herself in the world and to discover her relationship to what surrounds her. Elizete ponders:

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[18] *In Another Place, Not Here* actually began as a poem, as Brand explains to Silvera:

> At the end of my last book, *No Language Is Neutral*, there's a line that goes "In another place, not here, a woman might touch something between beauty and nowhere… back there and here." I like that line, and that line is supposed to be the beginning of something else. So I began to think about that and I thought of it as being a poem, a long poem, and this is where I made that very critical, practical judgement. For me to write a long poem, it takes me years. And I wanted to get my hands in and work faster. And for me working faster is working fiction. ("In the Company" 374–75)

See also Brand's discussion of this subject with Tihanyi (9).

> Adela is dead now long gone. I think about her when I get to know about her. I watch things and wonder what Adela would call this if it wasn't nowhere, pull and throw bush, make haste weed, jump up and kiss me flowers, waste of time plant, …draw blood leaf, stinging leaf bush, Jack Spaniard tree, wait in the road come night time bird. I make up these names for Adela' things. I used to keep them in my head for Adela because I get to find out that Adela forgot she true name and she tongue before she leave this earth. (20)

Elizete engages language to name the world around her, and to claim it through definition. The language Brand brings to bear on the world, like Elizete's, effects literalness in its description, a kind of honesty that derives its substance from observation rather than predetermined meaning. This kind of blunt, naming language serves to indemnify the absence of expression left by the silencing of previous generations.

Elsewhere, Brand describes to Daurio the kind of language she wants to lay claim to: "The one that I want contains the resistances to how that language [i.e., Received Standard English] was made, because that language was made through imperialism, through the oppression of women. As women and as peoples of colour we write against that language" ("Language" 15). If to engage poetry is, as Brand suggests, to "reach for perfect speech" (Tihanyi 8)—to infuse language with maximal emotional, sensuous, psychic, and philosophic weight, and to do so with an accuracy readers will confuse with their own—writing poetry produces a diamond-like clarity of perception that illuminates the essences of more opaque genres. Brand's is a language intent on constructing a "true name" and "tongue" to recuperate what must be remembered and spoken anew.

Chapter 6

Trials of Idealism and the Imperative Obstinacy of Good Faith

> Revolutions do not happen outside you, they happen in the vein, they change you and you change yourself, you wake up in the morning changing. You say this is the human being I want to be. You are making yourself for the future …in your throat [is] the warm elixir of the possible.
> ~Dionne Brand, *Bread Out of Stone*

> To reclaim the Black body from that domesticated, captive, open space is the creative project always underway.
> ~Dionne Brand, *A Map to the Door of No Return*

Readers familiar with Brand's body of work will find at the heart of her two extended prose pieces many of the issues central to her understanding of social and political structures and their failure to bring about social equity for Blacks and people of colour in Canada. *Bread Out of Stone: Recollections on Sex, Recognitions, Race, Dreaming, and Politics*, and *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*, centre on identifying and understanding the ideological precepts that operate to manage the material life of Canada's citizens and immigrants. The second collection goes somewhat farther than the first in exploring the effects of an irredeemable tear in the fabric of geographic, historical, and familial continuity that, according to Brand, informs the nature of Black life in the African diaspora as it is experienced in Canada and the Caribbean.

The essays that comprise *Bread Out of Stone* and *A Map to the Door of No Return* represent a medium for communication that differs in several respects from the other text-based genres Brand deploys. They diverge from the oral herstories of *No Burden to Carry* in that they allow for a more philosophical and associative approach to core social issues; while many of the essays of the first collection, and most of the "fragments" of the

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latter, discuss historical events, Brand draws on a wider range of experiences, readings, political affiliations and actions, remembrances, and impressions than the medium of oral herstory allows for. This dynamic holds true, too, for her essays of a sociological nature that were considered in Chapter 3: dependent less on programmatic, sociological information specific to fairly narrow fields of labour and economic analysis and description, *Bread Out of Stone* and *A Map to the Door of No Return* are less formal in their tone of address, less intensely pedagogical, and are consequently more personal and more personable. Moreover, these works function in a manner not wholly dissimilar to Brand's documentary films, in that the essays offer something like "access to *the* world," mediated as that access is (Nichols 109). The effect of this real-world engagement is the reader's sense of sharing in Brand's introspective, emotional, and gut responses to her subject matter. Brand's observations—the comparisons she draws and the analyses that result—are shown to be of "*the* world," grounded in lived experience and derivative of verifiable conditions. In short, the legitimacy of Brand's contentions is made evident in her analysis and is shown to warrant her readers' consideration. Because the compositions are non-fiction, Brand's address to the reader is direct and, through not necessarily conversational, they evoke a sense of immediacy and historical poignancy that resonate along a continuum of social issues and aspirations.

The jazz of heterogeneity, a depth of multiple registers

Because non-fiction essays do not carry a narrative confined to a fictionally linked set of characters, and because it is not so spare or precise a form as poetry, the essay proves itself a dextrous communicative conduit: it sustains a more associative collaboration of threads, themes, and proceedings. As Elisabeth Harvor remarks in her review of *A Map to the Door of No Return*, "Given the choice between a metaphor and a simile, Brand will choose a metaphor every time" ("In Her Solitude" D4). *Bread Out of Stone*'s essays bear out Harvor's assessment. Brand's method of persuasion frequently relies on linking distinct manifestations of a given theme: rather than try to convince her reader that the riverbank beneath his feet, say, is unsound, Brand leads the reader across a network of thematically linked stepping stones to the far side of the river; from there, the previously occupied bank can be subjected to scrutiny from a new perspective. Oftentimes, the foundation of the far bank is revealed to be rotten.

This metaphor of the many steps necessary to cross over from the staid and familiar to a new and positively-dislocated perspective approximates an excursion Brand takes across Toronto on a streetcar and recounts in her essay "Jazz."[1] A consummate believer in the benefits and the necessity of cultural heterogeneity, she attends here to the polyglot nature of Toronto's vernacular:

> Riding the College or Dundas streetcar, I listen to the sound of voices changing timbre, sibilances, assonances, cadences, breathiness, finally languages as the streetcar crosses the city from Roncesvalles to Main and beyond—from slow English to Ukrainian to German to West Indian to Tamil to Italian to Portuguese to Nova Scotia African to Nova Scotia English to Cantonese to Vietnamese to corporate and medical silence on University to Cantonese again to Yonge Streetese, which is a glorious mishmash of all, to Regent Park West Indian to

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[1] "Jazz" was first presented as an address at the Guelph Jazz Festival in 1996.

> Scotian to Vietnamese to working-class English, or is it third-generation white immigrant, to Punjabi to Urdu and banking off to Main. (*BOS* 142)

Brand pairs the first half of her heteroglot travelogue with her return trip, describing the dialects and vernacular of Anglo punks, Black punks, Italian and Portuguese women returning home after shifts cleaning downtown offices, nurses that are Black and Filipino, and so on and so on (142–43). Familiar already with Brand's endorsement of the absolute necessity of a heteroglot discourse to describe her own transit through and location within dominant and subaltern cultures (as discussed in Chapter 5), the symbolism of the College or Dundas streetcar analogy begins to crystallize: not only is Toronto's diversity vibrant, but heterogeneity, quite simply, has the city inextricably in its grasp.

Upon reading Kamau Brathwaite's "Jazz and the West Indian Novel," an essay that delves into the structure of Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, and Roger Mais novels, Brand notes "some things become obvious in my own writing—its hybridity across all of those influences; the search for multiple registers outweighing the simple outline of story; the horns, cacophonous against the melody, the overtones clanging and the simple pull of community" (*BOS* 160–61). A kind of organic chaos and rapprochement reigns in Brand's model of a heterogeneous city, the texture and complexity of which finds a place to call home in her. "I resist the idea of a mono-culture for this," declares Brand, for this intricacy and fertile complication (143). Brand's opposition to coerced sameness inevitably comes to loggerheads with assertions levelled by Canada's so-called founding cultures, English and French, that Canada should be a space where the impact and implications of outside history is should be minimized and the new practices of the nation embraced. The implication of this logic is that any cultural baggage brought on the journey must not eclipse or differ significantly from the established European norm.

Extending the breadth of the nation

In "Bathurst," Brand advances an intriguing theory that accounts, in some respects, for white-authored letters to the editor that throb with the leitmotifs of intolerance and ossification, of settled comfort: "why can't we [viz., people of colour] just assimilate," they ask (36). Brand reasons that while European migrants to Canada sought to escape from their pasts, Blacks were robbed of their pasts and forced into their future; as she phrases it, "by the time [Blacks] hit this moment [of North American settlement] white people were flying out of their history and Black people toward theirs" (37). Brand posits the following as a mindset characteristic of white settlers in this country:

> For them the romance of making a new life without the past is compelling so the idea of a Canadian—something to be filled in ready-made with a flag and an anthem and no discernable or accountable past (despite colonisation by the British and the French)—appeals to white Europeans needing an empty space, a space without painful history, a past antiseptic and innocent.... a pristine and forgetful nation. (37)

Brand proposes the experience has been different for Black immigrants:

> Black people, on the other hand, living in Canada, coming to Canada, living in the United States or the Caribbean had and have the task of the necessary retrieval of our stolen history. We do not wish to run from our history but to recover it; our

> history is to us redemptive and restorative; inasmuch as it binds us in a common pain it binds us in a common quest for a balm of that pain. (37)

The principal implication of Brand's supposition is that the objectives and circumstances of white and Black "settlement" are antithetical, and that they reflect irreconcilable differences in the manner in which Blacks and whites arrived in the Americas.

Brand's proposed white paradigm for a new nation-narrative for the "New World" rationalizes the call for non-white immigrants' assimilation. Insistence upon uniformity works to the advantage of those who carry the signifier of privilege, access, and economic potential: white skin. Any assertions of the possibility of a uniform "Canadianness" implies that a level playing field exists for all participants, and that the responsibility for the failure to achieve "equality" falls strictly to the individual. The omission and occlusion of disparate circumstances, which have resulted in an actual multiplicity of nation-narratives in Canada's development, work as technologies of a disingenuous equalization.

Additionally, assertions made regarding the need for a homogeneous Canadian populace operate to unify the purchasing public: "Homogeneity is a hegemonic strategy of capital to produce a 'pure' identity to be filled up with consumers," assesses Brand (*BOS* 144). Paradoxically, the general reluctance in Canada to acknowledge the unequal socio-economic potentialities of different racial groups—even as those disparities persist—is beneficial to capitalist relations of production dependent upon exploitation to turn a profit.

If Wilson Harris is correct in his observance that "[c]ultural homogeneity … extrapolates … an unchanging sanction of identity" (qtd. in Brand 135), it is inevitable that conflict should flare up between the cultivation of a comparatively static, white construction of "Canadianness," and Black subjectivities that express difference from the hegemonic archetype. The reality and the experience of difference are simultaneously inescapable because skin colour proscribes unhindered access to that normalized construction. Indeed, sustaining an archetype of normalcy, of "Canadianness," requires organized ideological instruction and the active repression of difference. It is the latter half of this equation that Sri Bhaggiyadatta and Brand document so compellingly in *Rivers Have Sources*. Brand stands in opposition to this uniformity, exacted by a fixed national subjectivity: "I do not resist the idea of a 'Canadianness' wholly," she remarks; "I resist the particular myth-making process of the Canadian nation-state. I resist the idea that the collectivity is a done deal, a coat to slip on ready-made, …a thing that cannot be added to, reassessed, challenged, criticised, changed. And I resist the notion that it is somehow pure and superior" (*BOS* 41–42).

I suggest that Brand's opposition stems from three central concerns. First, the ideology of a closed and fixed social model elides and represses differences that, as noted, already exist in Canada and which have never been absent from Canada since colonization. Charlotte Sturgess, in "Dionne Brand: Writing the Margins," points out that "[c]ontemporary racism and sexism, whether the backdrop or the explicit theme's of Brand's work, effect erasure of the individual in the present, even as the retrace the erasure of origins in a colonial past. Presence itself has then to be constantly mediated through discontinuity" (203). For those excluded from the defined norm, "imagination, representation and culture" (*BOS* 136) are ever under siege. Brand writes:

> The idea of these concepts as given and uncontested spaces, spaces without choice or judgement, spaces free of all we have lived or long to live, free of our material struggles—that these are spaces self-evidently honest and moral, without prejudice or failure…—this idea is disingenuous. Rather, they are places of wars, ascendancies, claiming grounds, hegemonic strategy. (136)

As an artist and political being, Brand is repelled by claims to simulacrums of fixity and sameness that impose a crushing and insupportable weight upon cultural variance, and upon the development of Canada as a nation of mixed peoples. The actual racial and cultural heterogeneity of Toronto represents an organic social normalcy, "places with the uncomfortable certainty of uncertainty, places of reckoning with other consciousnesses, histories, desires, descriptions, interpretations, visions and visionings" (137). Brand's opposition to enforced cultural and ideological sameness reflects her commitment to acknowledge, grow from, and participate in the inevitability of difference.

The implications of Brand's commitment to cultural and racial difference are distinguishable from an investment in multiculturalism. While there is little in Brand's work to indicate she is at odds with hybridity, the philosophical bent evident in her praise of a social milieu that requires one to "[reckon] with other consciousnesses, histories, desires, descriptions, interpretations, visions and visionings" suggests the notion of hybridity is inadequate—either to account for or to celebrate real difference, heterogeneity. That is, it is not enough to pledge allegiance to an abstracted ideal of racial and multicultural variety and interaction; it is necessary to acknowledge actual difference, and the disparity difference occasions, as a fundamental component of human existence. Difference demands attention and assessment, not for the purpose of harmonizing difference into a kind of invisible uniformity, but to normalize the fact of dissimilarity. To cultivate a healthy expectation of discrepancy within a population is to legitimate and endorse difference at the level of cognitive coexistence. To do so, however, is to undermine the socio-economic hierarchy that validates (and survives as a result of) the racial and cultural inequalities that conserve and attenuate concentrations of power.

Downsizing entitlement, and the penalties of flying low

The deleterious, material effects of exclusion from Canada's socio-economic milieu, particularly as they impinge on the young generation of Blacks, elicit Brand's criticism in a second arena. Writing of young Blacks in Toronto, she warns, "They're not on the street like my generation before them; their view is inward, nursing wrath" (*BOS* 59). Brand perceives a pervasive nihilism among Toronto's Black youth, a social disengagement and repudiation radically different from her generation's engagement with the movements and politics of the 1970s. The 1970s generation was active in the Black Power movement, participated in study groups and student organizations to hone critical consciousness (30), and read Frantz Fanon and Walter Rodney on the nature of racism and its possible solutions (60); individuals "changed [their] names to Akua, Ayanna, Kwame, Kwetu, hoping that [they] could use the magic of these names, like garments made of stronger cloth to thread [their] way back through the portals of the slave castles, back to [their] true selves" (69). In contrast, contemporary young Blacks want for a sense of political agency and, consequently, are (mis)directed principally by cynicism (73). Brand does not blame them for being so: in 1994, when Brand wrote her essay

"Brownman, Tiger…," she pronounced that the "cloud that stands between us and the sun, between us and love and life and power stands ever more pressing. We had expected it to be gone. We [the preceding generation] had promised it to this generation and so we cannot fault their nihilism and their loss of faith" (68–69). In 1992, a riot ignited on Yonge Street in Toronto after the acquittal of Lawrence Powell, Stacy Koon, Timothy Wind, and Theodore Briseno, the four Los Angeles police officers charged with the use of excessive force in the beating of African American Rodney King;[2] this riot, Brand suggests, fell on the heels of the failure of her generation to eradicate racism, to prevent "over a decade of … police killings of Black people and police brutality." Brand admits, "we could not nor did we have it in us to tell them to wait and justice would come" (121). While the 1970s was a period of radical opposition, self-empowerment, and intellectual engagement with the issues of civil rights, Canada, in the 1990s, lacked the social cohesiveness of Black community; there was no record of efficacious, productive, life-altering protest to draw upon and thus entice the disenfranchised to collaborate in pressing for change.

Writing of her youth, and her education in Trinidad during the flurry of decolonisation, Brand avers: "[W]e were lucky to have a country around us that expected more of us, as mixed and crazy as all of the contradictions of class and gender and race were; nationalism and the national good included us. But in the nakedness of Canada, where the construction of nationalism as including you falls away" (177), she warns, the fixity and closure of what it means to be Canadian denies Blacks a sense of participation in an ongoing national project that should be about them.

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[2] The acquittal of the officers on April 29, 1992, led to riots in which 54 individuals were killed, and hundreds injured; looting and fires caused more than one billion dollars (U.S.) in property damage. After the acquittal of the officers on April 29, 1992, U.S. President George Bush and Attorney General William Barr initiated, at the federal level, the investigation and prosecution of the officers. The jury convicted Officers Powell and Koon and acquitted Officers Wind and Briseno. Powell and Koon were sentenced to thirty months in federal correctional camps and began their incarceration in October of 1993.

Finally, Brand's opposition to the contemporary developments in racial struggle centres on what she perceives as the ideological compromises people of colour have accepted, vis-à-vis social ideals and social entitlement, in a racist system that continues to rein in the psychological gains of the 1970s—the sense of collectivity, and practical social reformation through organized actions.[3] The present power of hegemony in North America, Brand suggests, is such that the ideals of the great race-based social movements of the 60s and 70s have been downsized. Present throughout *Bread Out of Stone* is Brand's promotion of Black *entitlement* to egalitarian treatment in Canada. While Brand's reservations around the Black Power movement should by now be familiar, the movement nevertheless had a crucial quality she considers to be absent from contemporary struggles for civil rights: a larger vision of what a better way of living should entail. She reflects on the Black Power era:

> So the movement was far from perfect, but ... I also heard that the struggle was not a struggle for the petty gains of privilege the system will give, as the system

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[3] I am thinking here of the Black Students' Union (BSU) that operated on the campuses of the University of Toronto, York University, Ryerson Polytechnic, and community colleges. As I noted in Chapter 2, the BSU was instrumental in introducing several programmes and initiatives, including: the Transitional Year Program at the University of Toronto, which benefited Blacks who wanted to attend university but required financial assistance or additional academic preparation; and the Black Education Project, which operated to reduce the streaming of Black students in high schools, and provided education focussed on Black culture for students and families.

> gives what reinforces it. And I also heard that we had to move beyond individual aspirations and retake the vision we had created first in the goals of emancipation and liberation. That vision was, after all, something about the possibilities for human existence…. the nature of human beings and human freedom. (*BOS* 83–84)

Brand considers the decline in vocal opposition to the effects of racism and sexism in the 1990s to be the result not of improved overall standards or conditions of employment and social equity, but rather of abridged opportunities and economic certainty for Blacks. Consequently, the social impulse has been one not merely of accommodation, but of flying beneath the radar.

At a funeral for a woman long engaged in the fight for civil rights, Brand takes particular note of the eulogies: "[R]inging through them was the idea of upliftment, and I realised that at some point the idea of upliftment had replaced the idea of justice and that equality rather than justice had become what we were fighting for…. Did we only want to be equal to white people or did we want to end exploitation and oppression?" (81–82). In the face of white culture's persistent protestations of socio-economic innocence, people of colour, suggests Brand, "modify their claims to words such as 'access', [sic] 'representation' and 'inclusion' instead of entitlement" (191). Brand longs for public demands that are more daring, claims that are more self-righteous. The contrast between the spirit of accommodation resonant in the eulogy and the practices of defiance and protest that galvanized much of Toronto's Black community in the 1970s sheds light on a tragically diminished sense of safety and belonging.

On the subject of social resistance, Gramsci notes: "[I]t may happen as in human life, that the more an individual is compelled to defend his own immediate physical existence, the more will he uphold and identify with the highest values of civilisation and humanity, in all their complexity" (*Prison* 170). Gone is the attachment to those "highest values," suggests Brand: the struggle on behalf of entitlement has faltered for lack of energy or hope, and the condition of mere survival has become adequate to sustain the status quo.

The trial of compassionate vision

"What would we create as a more realistic and life-representing expression of our collectivity?": this is the question Brand poses at the conclusion of her essay "Imagination, Representation and Culture" (*BOS* 145).[4] The question is a significant one and, indeed, is indicative of the ideological foundation upon which Brand's oeuvre is constructed. The question surfaces over and again in *Bread Out of Stone*: what compassionate vision of the social world can and should stand in opposition to the hierarchies of race, class, and gender, mandated by the dominant structures of imperialism, patriarchy, and, ultimately, capitalism? The question goes to the heart of the organic intellectual project, which aims to generate and solidify a new ideological Weltanschauung. The organic intellectual objective resides, in part, in the cultivation of a progressive, collective system of values, beliefs, and ideals; it lies also in a social agenda that aims not only for comprehensive representation but the overall improvement of social equity through technologies of difference previously mobilized for the purposes of division and fragmentation.

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[4] "Imagination, Representation and Culture" was initially delivered as a speech at the Conference on Multiculturalism at York University in 1977.

The essays in *Bread Out of Stone* critically assess many of the dominant, common-sense beliefs that ground hegemonically organized and deployed constructions of class, race, immigration, and cultural appropriation—precepts that operate to homogenize the Canadian nation-state. bell hooks has declared that "[i]ssues of *mere recognition* are linked to the practice of imperialist racial domination" (qtd. in Brand, *BOS* 114, my emphasis). hooks's assertion, wherein "mere recognition" operates in lieu of substantive insight, is analogous to Brand's comment about the ideological effect of racism: "the *act* of race and racism is to sweep away very quickly whole masses of people with *one* kind of ideology" (Personal interview). The shallow comprehension evident in protectionist and derogatory comments about immigrant labour and the relations of production in Canada succumbing to economic pressures to employ immigrants reveals a non-critical mode of thinking that is neither historically grounded nor dialectical. Brand writes:

> Here a racist revisionism is in full swing in this country that never talks about race but about immigration and self-government, meaning people of colour and First Nations' people, meaning anybody who ain't white…. They say cut back immigration from countries that are not compatible with Canadian culture, meaning white culture. They say immigrants are taking away Canadian jobs, as if immigration is something altruistic and not about the economy and cheap labour. (*BOS* 72–73)

Brand here takes on the task of scuppering the under-girding ideological paradigms that make the economy of common-sense essentialisms feasible and practical in a system that seeks to protect white privilege in the arenas of education, employment, and the distribution of wealth. Brand's tone is one of frank, underwhelmed disdain for the hegemonic, discursive veil that is thrown over a framework of racist anxiety and illogical entitlement—deployed in the legitimating framing language of compatible homogeneity and an idealized desire to work. The unceremonious manner in which Brand deconstructs these claims is significant because it works quickly to demystify a language of camouflage and distraction.

Fragment: the flash of counter-vision, "a different intellectual cosmos"

A bright cultural encounter, endowed with reasons for optimism, marks Brand's experience of a trip to Tobago, described in "Just Rain, Bacolet."[5] A moment of cultural immersion indicates that outside North America, in the Caribbean, the possibility of an oppositional Weltanschauung has not only taken hold—albeit in a limited context—but serves as the interpretive norm. Brand relates the experience of Faith Nolan, her traveling partner, who has gone to see *Indecent Proposal* (1993), the story of a millionaire (played by Robert Redford) intent on seducing a married woman (Demi Moore); he offers her and her husband (Woody Harrelson) one million dollars if she agrees.

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[5] "Just Rain, Bacolet" was first published in *Writing Away* (McClelland and Stewart, 1994).

Brand does not go to see the film because her childhood experiences of watching American movies at the local theatre, the Rex, make her apprehensive about the larger implications of what she will see there; "I was fearful," she notes, "that what I would see on the screen would confirm the place we occupied in the world. We were going to see how much better white people lived than we did and how far away the reach to that living was because we would have to reach into white skin to live it" (*BOS* 7). Nolan's experience upsets expectation, however. Not only are the white characters heckled by the Black audience, the larger premise of the film finds no purchase in the crowd. Brand writes:

> Nobody was buying it and not just because it was a silly-ass movie in any terms but because nobody was buying the general screen. She [i.e., Nolan] said she finally felt a whole audience feeling like her and more—outside the screen and critical, belonging to another intellectual cosmos, one that was not craziness but sense.... She had spent so much of her life in the lonely deconstruction of the American movie text that the Rex was home, the true meeting of the hegemonic and the counter-hegemonic, and the counter-hegemonic made more than sense, it was normal. (8)

The revelation at the Rex, that is, the popular disconnect of a Black Trinidadian audience from the American underwriting of patriarchy and capitalism, is noteworthy to Brand because it represents a collective disdain for the social disequilibrium produced by capitalism. The *collective* nature of the audience's dismissal encourages Brand and Nolan because the ideological "norm" is perceived to be antithetical to the pervasive homage paid to the power of money in North America—*Indecent Proposal* being a silly-ass movie notwithstanding. Nolan and Brand find reasons to be optimistic that outside the immediate sphere of U.S. cultural influence, capitalism's dominant ideology has no purchase. Instead, that ideology teases out the possibility of a different view of how the world can and should function. "What we are debating in the end," Brand proposes, "is what a society sees, must find, as important to its psychic, moral and human self" (*BOS* 191). For Brand, there is no question that what is important lives outside the realm of capital.

The essays of *Bread Out of Stone* offer deep and thought-provoking perspectives on the ideologies, framework, and consequences of capitalism, and its attendant structures of racism, for Blacks in Canada. In many respects, they are the antithesis of *Indecent Proposal*: they focus on the exploitation of peoples that do not have clear cut choices about whether or not to submit to exploitative labour propositions. While there is little reason to think Adrian Lyne, director of *Indecent Proposal*, sought to explore a substantive moral dilemma, or to do so for any purpose other than entertainment, Brand understands that what is at stake at the heart of her own address is the formulation of a social model that invokes socio-historical analysis as a means to effect positive change in the lives of real people. These are not silly-ass essays.

Way-finding and map-less origins

Early in *A Map to the Door of No Return*, Brand quotes David Turnball who writes in *Maps Are Territories*, "In order to find our way successfully, it is not enough just to have a map. We need a cognitive schema as well as a practical mastery of way-finding" (*MDR* 16). This maxim is as close as one might come to an adumbration of

Brand's penultimate text,[6] were it possible to summarize its moral in a few words. Paradoxically, however, in light of Brand's insistence throughout the work that return passage to or through the Door of No Return is an impossibility, it would seem the map required to reach that door is, too, unattainable. What remains constant, then, is the need for a cognitive schema with which to navigate the world and thus offset the Black condition of exclusion from an essential historical continuity. Much of *A Map to the Door of No Return*, which dwells on the impossibility of finding one's way back to that door—the door to a healing and holistic connection with ancestral, racial, and geographic origins—commits its exposition to an exploration of how that imperative schema is developed, to what it is tied, and the forces that obstruct its tempering.

Among the possible paradigms such a schema might inhabit, Brand proposes that in fact Blackness subsists within an imposed praxis of "captivity":

> [E]xistence in the Diaspora is like that—dreams from which one never wakes. Then what here can be called cognition let alone a schema? A set of dreams, a strand of stories which never come into being, which never coalesces. One is not in control in dreams; the dreamer is captive.... Captured in one's own body, in one's own thoughts, to be out of possession of one's mind; our cognitive schema is captivity. (28–29)

Captivity describes a number of aspects of living Black in Canada: the angst of disconnection, the impossibility of return and, as Brand indicates, a dearth of control over one's self-expression.

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[6] Prior to the completion of this dissertation, Brand published her latest book of poetry, *Thirsty* (1992).

The absence of self-definition, or the virtual impossibility of claiming self-definition as primary, is a fundamental feature of the Black body according to Brand. She commented on this phenomenon in our interview:

> I tried to talk … in *A Map to the Door*, about always being painfully conscious of one's presence *as completely outside of oneself*. As making a pattern for someone else to figure out. It's work! It's a lot of work…. One engages with the world, and given the historic and political circumstances, one's approach to it is dictated in some ways by what it presents. (Personal interview, my emphasis)

In *A Map to the Door of No Return*, Brand sketches, in detail, some of these imposed representations and occupations of the Black body. In the second section of a collection of brief passages entitled "Captive and Inhabited," the Black body is variously identified—"as a sign of particular cultural and political meanings in the Diaspora" (35), and as "a kind of 'naturalized' body in the popular culture," distinguishing it from scientific activity or "activity having formal authority" (36).[7] She also describes the Black body "as physically and psychically open space…. A space not simply owned by those who embody it but constructed and occupied by other embodiments" (38). In this last instance, Brand points to the occupation of the bodies of Black basketball luminaries Shaquille O'Neal and Damon Stoudamire (38–39), and of Canadian Seoul Olympian Ben Johnson, track star and outlaw: "The body valued and cursed in 9.79 seconds" (39).

A consequence of the captivity and inhabitation borne by the Black body in Western culture is that it is rendered a vacant sign, one that can be appropriated to signify specified sets of meanings that meet the demands of white hegemony at given moments. Brand writes:

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[7] As I suggested in Chapter 5, this categorization of the Black body as natural and not scientific also has particular relevance to the female body, as is evident in Brand's poem "Phyllis" (*NLN*) 12.

> It is domesticated in the sense that there are set characteristics ascribed to the body which have the effect of familiarizing people with it—making it a kind of irrefutable common sense or knowledge. It is a wild space in the sense that it is a sign of transgression, opposition, resistance, and desire. The Black body is culturally encoded as physical prowess, sexual fantasy, moral transgression, violence, magical musical artistry. These ascriptions are easily at hand for everyday use. Much as one would use a tool or instrument to execute some need or want. (35–36)

In *Older Stronger Wiser*, the "common sense" appraisal applied to the bodies of the women whose narratives constitute the film and contribute to *No Burden to Carry* corroborate Brand's assessment of racial ascriptions: the implication of their Blackness as sign of their suitability for in-service and factory labour is ascribed by white homeowners and plant operators. This subject is also taken up in "Black Women and Work."

Release from history, and the signifying of names

In a line from Derek Walcott's *The Bounty*—"*Pray for a life without plot, a day without narrative*"—Brand finds expression of her own impulse to escape the external classification of her being (qtd. in *MDR* 42). In response to Walcott's line, she writes: "It described perfectly my desire for relief from the persistent trope of colonialism. To be without this story of captivity, to dis-remember it, or to have this story forget me, would be heavenly. But of course in that line too is the indifference, the supplication of prayer"

(42). Freire expresses an empathetic reading of history and fate that champions popular agency. He writes: "The understanding of history as *opportunity* and not *determinism* … would be unintelligible without the *dream*, just as the *deterministic* conception feels uncomfortable, in its incompatibility with this understanding and therefore denies it" (91). Because the resolution of her dilemma by way of entreaty to the divine or as a result of history's amnesia is implausible, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, like the rest of her oeuvre, is an act of self-preservation. That is to say, Brand's work asserts a comprehensive array of individual and collective engagements with history, subjectivities, experiences, fictions, speculations, dreams, cravings, and aspirations that speak against the essentialist history and characteristics ascribed to the Black body. Indeed, "the Black body" is pluralized as Brand "empties" the singular constructed body of its enforced significations and grants it its own histories, herstories, and motivations, instincts and rationales. Brand promotes a multiplicity of inexact characteristics to counter the diffusely managed but rigorously codified essentialisms that are simultaneously refined and emptied of complexity by the ideological apparatuses of colonialism and capitalism.

The tactical means of achieving this necessary multiplicity includes the identification and deconstruction of unprepossessing, common-sense paradigms that claim to represent or encapsulate Black bodies, Black essence, something Brand takes on in her exploration of the definitions imposed on those bodies across modern history in order to define and contain (*MDR* 35–42). The tools Brand employs to deconstruct racial essentialisms also include discourse analysis of the particular language deployed to decontextualize the presence of non-white races in Canada, the application of words that skew perception of events or ideas. She writes, for example:

> In 1999 a ship carrying children, teenagers, from China was apprehended off the coast of British Columbia. Newspapers and televisions referred to them as "migrants" and migrants they no doubt were, but one cannot help reading the exclusion of these "migrants" from the category of "children," which would make it possible to include them in a definition of family reserved for the people within the nation. All the accoutrement of outsider could then be brought to regulate and choreograph their appearance both on the television screens and in newspaper photographs as well as the interior of the body politic. (*MDR* 65)

Brand reveals in her close reading of *migrant* and other words—*Spook* (93–94), *Migration* (24), *leave* and *taking* (21), *End up* and *Land* (150)—and of prose (200–02), the politics and ideology inherent in classification and description. It is with carefully applied masking language that hegemony garners momentum and substance.

With *A Map to the Door of No Return*, Brand also works to individualize history and perception in such a way that History and ideology are revealed to be the outcome of the layering and amalgamation of many fragments of perception, consciousness, and inherited wisdom. *A Map to the Door of No Return* manifests this model of associative mental synthesis in two ways. First, as is feasible in non-fiction, Brand cites or mentions in passing—and incorporates or challenges—the ideas and life-examples of more than seventy individuals: authors such as Toni Morrison (43, 45, 60, 128), V. S. Naipaul (59, 205), Olaudah Equiano (182), and Ralph Ellison (93); many personal friends, comrades, and family members; historical figures and actors, including Toussaint L'Ouverture

(183–88), Anne Frank (82), and the little known rebel slave Thisbe (205); scholars such as Aimé Césaire (58), Albrecht Durer (29–30), and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (31, 61). As well, she includes those who would remain anonymous but for the violence committed against them at the hands of the police: Abner Louima, assaulted by Justin Volpe with a broomstick in a Brooklyn precinct (47), and Marcus Omofuma, "an asylum seeker, who died while being deported from Vienna to Sofia.... bound and gagged" on an airplane (46–47). Naming and attribution are two methods Brand uses to humanize and contextualize individuals and thereby remove them from the anonymity of assorted, homogenizing categories.[8]

The freedom of form and freedom from it

The second manifestation of what I am calling associative synthesis in *A Map to the Door of No Return* resides in the text's form. The book, devoid of a table of contents, also wants for conventional chapters. In lieu, the text comprises many headings, only one of which, "Maps," appears consistently; the others surface only once. Segments are delineated by headings indicative of the general themes to which the given sections adhere; additionally, each section may be divided by subheadings or merely by numbered passages that trace the familiar or oblique trajectories of those themes. Brand elaborated on her framing of the work in our interview:

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[8] Naming is a technique employed by the powerful to validate specific agendas, while refusal by the powerful to name serves to obscure the particularity of the other. The gathering to commemorate the recent one-year anniversary of the terrorist devastation of the World Trade Center saw, or rather heard, the reading of the 2,801 names of the individuals killed in the catastrophe, a recitation that required nearly three hours to complete. The names of individual victims were also read aloud at the Shanksville, PA, and the U.S. Pentagon crash sites. At a special session of Congress assembled in New York on 6 September 2002, U.S. Poet Laureate Billy Collins read his commemorative poem, aptly titled "The Names." The emphasis the U.S. placed on individualizing and contextualizing victims contrasts markedly with the anonymity of over 600 alleged al Qaeda members held incommunicado at the U.S. naval base in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

> about eight years ago, maybe, when I was making these films and I was doing a lot of the non-fiction, like *No Burden*, like *Bread Out of Stone*, then I thought much more of them in terms of this piece will probably do that, and that kind of piece will do that. Now it's changed again in the sense that I don't want to write non-fiction in those ways anymore. Because what has changed in me also is the debate around shape, around form.... So the last book, *A Map to the Door of No Return*, is a different kind of form. So I'm not paying attention any more to certain kinds of shapes. Because this debate is also the debate not just about the content of the thing, but about the structure of it. (Personal interview)

What I draw from these comments is Brand's commitment to devise an inclusive narrative structure that departs from conventional linear narrative and modernity's organization of information to which the myths of nation building and homogeneity are consistently bound.

Brand expresses considerable reservations about the particular narrative modes employed to historicize a people's belonging to the nation, modes that hark back to pure origins and draw upon a disingenuous construction of nation in order to solidify ownership and occupation of that nation-space. Brand writes her scepticism:

> Too much has been made of origins. And so if I reject this notion of origins I have also to reject its mirror, which is the sense of origins used by the powerless to contest power in a society.... they must draw very definite borders to contain

> their constituencies as well as, in the case of the powerful, to aggressively exclude the other and, in the case of the powerless, to weakly do the same while waving a white flag to the powerful for inclusion. Each of these arguments select and calcify origins. Out of a multiplicity of stories, they cobble together a narrative glossing over accident, opportunism, necessity, and misdirection. They uplift aggression and carnage into courage, they exaggerate cunning into pride. (*MDR* 69–70)

The paeans extended in Canadian nation-myths to promote ideologies of cohesion, origin, and uniformity function to displace an alternate cognitive schema, one that would acknowledge disparities of origin as inevitable and natural. A pragmatic alternative schema would also recognize the fact and nature of differentiated accessibility to cultural resources that devolve from differences of origin; it would also articulate the unequal investments in maintaining the status quo held by distinct populations predicated on race and sex.

To claims that Canada has effectively distanced itself from reductive constructions of nation and population, Brand insists, "We are drawn constantly to the European shape in [Canada's] definition. A shape, by the way, which obscures its own multiplicity. And when we read the hyphenated narratives [of marginalized groups] we see the angst produced by this unchanging quality" (72). This indictment echoes those made in *Bread Out of Stone* that, likewise, deconstruct affirmations of the presence of positive, fully functional multiculturalism and racial inclusiveness in Canada.

The associative narrative Brand constructs to displace conventional nation-narrative constitutes "a practical mastery of way-finding" and aims to elaborate upon existing narratives' accuracies and contradictions. Hers attends to those details already accounted for but also contextualize them within a broader framework of historical events and readings. Brand articulates her challenge to unitary narratives when she writes,

> I have not visited the Door of No Return, but by relying on random shards of history and unwritten memoir of descendants of those who passed through it, including me, I am constructing a map of the region, paying attention to faces, to the unknowable, to unintended acts of returning, to impressions of doorways. Any act of recollection is important, even looks of dismay and discomfort. Any wisp of a dream is evidence. (*MDR* 19)

The narrative Brand would construct by way of attending "to faces, to the unknowable," is necessarily provisional. It is not the sort of stable and inviolable narrative upon which modernity's nations or, indeed, unchanging subjectivities are commonly founded. But then, Brand would like to see a different kind of nation develop.

That concept of an ideal nation found its incarnation, for Brand at least, in Grenada. Grenada represented the possibility of a different kind of self-critical, collaborative enactment of community, one grounded in social action and consciousness. Moreover, it represented something remarkably personal: "I had come here in search of a thought, how to be human, how to live without historical pain," Brand explains (157). She writes—abashedly—about what that community represented for her: "It's still hard to say what it was now without someone sneering at it as if it is childish and impossible. I wanted to be free. I wanted to feel as if history was not destiny. I wanted some relief from the enclosure of the Door of No Return" (168). What is made evident by Brand's attention to the probable derision that her wish "to be free" will attract is the social improbability of certain language, and the utopian concepts that sort of framing language appeals to.

Charmaine Perkins, in a review of *Bread Out of Stone*, raises this issue of framing language. She asks: "How then do we find a vocabulary and a language that does not collapse into cliché and myth-making, where we can begin that enormous task of imagining and speaking our way into possibility and hopefulness in this Canadian landscape?" (17). With regard to Canada, Brand's critique in *Bread Out of Stone*, centred on the de facto displacement of the ideal and the expression of "entitlement" by "words such as 'access', 'representation' and 'inclusion'" (191), sheds light on the constricted nature of the concepts and language hegemony endorses. The relevance of Perkins's question clearly extends beyond the Canadian context. Its applicability in the case of the Grenada revolution—and the U.S. devastation of that populist movement—underscores the decisive influence U.S. policy has on shaping language and the aspirations that language gives voice to.

Composing revolution

It is important, I think, to attend to Brand's tone and message in the passage I recently cited about what it means "to be human." Her comments reveal a stubborn, almost implausible optimism about the possibility of a better life in Canada and the Caribbean, despite so much evidence to the contrary. As I remarked in Chapter 4, were it not for the level-headed solemnity with which Brand characteristically assesses the socio-historical processes that impinge on her, and the scrupulously cogent critique she brings to bear on what drives those processes, one would be tempted to dismiss her vision as naïve. On the other hand, one needs to consider what other possibilities will exist—or will not exist—if the fight for ideals is abandoned. Brand puts the same question, rhetorically, to Sandra Martin: "What is my alternative? A kind of defeatism, a complete capitulation to oppression, suppression, repression and some of the worst things that can happen to a human being" (71).

So how does one persist in a struggle that appears at best ill fated, and at worst hopeless? Brand's answer lies in a resolute commitment to "the longer view" (Martin 71), buttressed by a pragmatic recognition that everything stands to be gained while there is very little to lose. The ongoing engagement with social activism, avers Brand, "must depend on a vision of the thing that's bigger than this incident or that revolution. Because you lose, it doesn't mean you were wrong. It means you have lost maybe to somebody who had a few more helicopter gun-ships, a lot more money and a Pizza Hut" (Martin 71).[9] Clearly, Brand has no doubts about the tremendous potential and the dreams of what Grenada stood for.

In many respects, the revolution of Grenada's New Jewel Movement (NJM) reflected the kind of socialist, populist development Gramsci identifies as fundamental to social change and to the evolution of a new historical block and Weltanschauung. Once over the political phase of hegemonic development, during which the people's awareness of their solidarity of interests was established, Grenada entered what Gramsci calls the hegemonic phase. He writes: "[O]ne becomes aware that one's own corporate interests, in their present and future development, transcend the corporate limits of the mere economic class, and can and must become the interests of the other subordinate groups too." Gramsci continues:

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[9] In late 1996 or early 1997, during her first return visit to Grenada since the U.S. invasion, Brand witnessed the demolition of some houses and saw, at the centre of the rubble, a Pizza Hut. "A bloody Pizza Hut," she tells Martin. "So we exchanged all of that wonder and all that vision for a goddamned Pizza Hut" (71).

> [I]t is [this] phase in which previously germinated ideologies become "party", come into confrontation and conflict, until only one of them, or at least a single combination of them, tends to prevail, to gain the upper hand, to propagate itself throughout society—bringing about not only a unison of economic and political aims, but also intellectual and moral unity, posing all the questions around which the struggle rages not on a corporate but on a "universal" plane, and thus creating the hegemony of a fundamental social group over a series of subordinate groups. (*Prison* 181–82)

As a result of the near-ubiquitous poverty Grenada experienced under the leadership of Prime Minister Eric Gairy, and due to the relatively small population of the country, divisions among the poor and working class (which constituted the majority of the populace) were limited. In this regard, the diversity of interests among "subordinate groups" of which Gramsci writes was minimal. What divisions did exist lay primarily along lines of gender, not class.[10]

Political accountability and representation were cornerstones of the People's Revolutionary Government (PRG). Gail Lem describes the political structure of the PRG:

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[10] For a brief perspective on what the New Jewel Movement meant for women, see Nan Peacocke's "Grenada: A Woman's Revolution Deferred" (*Fireweed* 20, Winter/Spring 1985, 37–44).

> [T]he political leadership and officials in charge of government programmes must face the people on a regular basis to account for their performance in running the country. Each of Grenada's six parishes is divided into zones, where monthly meetings provide formal channels for interaction between the people and the government. Parallel structures have also been set up for mass organizations of workers, farmers, women and youth. A cabinet member is present at the meetings and the people can request the attendance of any government official. The meetings also provide for popular input into the legislative process. The maternity leave law, for example, is the result of initiatives taken by the people. (38)

The uncommonly close connection between national and local government officials and the people, and the direct influence the people exercised is shaping government policy, is indicative of an environment in which popular will binds the populace to the enactment of a political will. That will is further expressed in the popular endorsement of cultural and social agendas, such as literacy, employment, and agricultural training programmes. Grenada's socio-political environment was one in which the organic intellectual served the fundamental task of facilitating the articulation of popular will and organizing its communication to the PRG. Whether Brand, as a Canadian and an outsider to the government process, took on the role of the organic intellectual in Grenada is questionable; unmistakable, though, is the positive impression made upon her by individuals like Phyllis Coard (Minister of Women's Affair) and Jacqueline Creft (Minister of Education)—especially the latter's "dreaming of an extraordinary life" (*NLN*

14), and the intimate connection both women maintained with the people. Both were instrumental in sustaining and directing popular involvement in the governing process.

Brand's involvement in Grenada was necessarily restricted in part by her outsider status; it was also curtailed by her eventual removal from the island because of her Canadian citizenship (Brand, "U.S." 6). Her comment to Martin about adopting the long-term view, however, indicates her commitments to the ideals of the Grenadian revolution remain intact and they continue to take form in her writing. While the balance between intellectual work and work in the trenches remains a negotiated relationship, the advantage of the "written revolution" is that it is publicly sustainable in a manner that physical revolution rarely is, particularly within the U.S. sphere of influence. The potency of writing resides in its ability to transport the reader to a different consciousness and perspective: "a book asks us to embody, which at once takes us across borders of all kinds," notes Brand (*MDR* 190).

By way of a line of questioning that mirrors the logic of Ross Chambers, Brand affirms "[w]riting is an act of desire, as is reading. Why does someone enclose a set of apprehensions within a book?" she queries. "Why does someone else open that book if not because of the act of wanting to be wanted, to be understood, to be seen, to be loved?" (*MDR* 192). Certainly the acts of exposure, of translation, and of incorporation that Brand's writing enables perform the kinds of social work necessary for an intellectual revolution at a level accessible to, and at a degree of intensity that, many individuals can engage with in a manner that physical revolution disallows.

Brand's essays provide narratives that run counter to established History and, even in their articulation, disrupt the shifting, provisional seamlessness of nation-narratives. Homi Bhabha writes: "Counter-narratives of the nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries—both actual and conceptual—disturb those ideological manoeuvres through which "imagined communities" are given essentialist identities" (300). Brand's intromission of Black presence, herstories, outrages, and agendas into the ambit of textual manifestations of Canadian nation-narratives problematizes the common-sense paradigms of nation cultivated to homogenize history do so in order to make the People one. Her interjection is structured in the form of essays that contest ideological uniformity, and even the claims of multiculturalism, by drawing attention to material inequities and the disparities in civil liberties mandated by capitalism and mobilized through racism and patriarchy. If, as Bhabha argues, "the political unity of the nation consists in a continual displacement of its irredeemably plural modern space" (300), Brand insists upon that plurality through the deployment of narratives that defy at every turn the displacement of differences and which put the lie to uniformity.

Because her essays insist on the presence and complexity of Black existence, by linking historical reflection with current narratives of righteous or denied engagement, Brand disorders "a signifying [nation] space that is archaic and mythical" with chronicles that are contemporary and material (Bhabha 300). Moreover, her polemic is a dynamic one that contests the ideological undercurrents that seek to render Canada's territory as somehow fixed historically, or even geographically hermetic. The migrancy of people and the osmotic nature of the nation's core and boundaries are highlighted in order that heterogeneity not merely subsist but play a formative role in redefining the nation.

Conclusion

> I cannot understand human beings as simply living. I can understand them only as historically, culturally, and socially existing. I can understand them only as beings who are makers of their "way," in the making of which they lay themselves open to or commit themselves to the "way" that they make and that therefore remakes them as well.
>
> ~Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope*

> So politics has to be more than just the struggle for power. It's a struggle for fulfillment, it's a struggle for recognition, it's a struggle for acknowledgement, it's a struggle for survival, it's a struggle for betterment and liberation.
>
> ~ Edward Said, in W. J. T. Mitchell, "The Panic of the Visual: A Conversation with Edward Said"

This dissertation has sought to explore the generic range and engagements of Brand's works according to genre as discrete and collective interventions levelled against a hegemonic discourse particular to Canada, one that has long elided and devalued the presence, input, history, and humanity of Blacks, specifically Black women. Brand's exercise of generic attributes—to highlight the particular origins of her material and to attract express audiences, to negotiate linguistic alternatives with integrity, and to involve her readers in narratives that cultivate deeper comprehension of Black experiences, complexity, and history—is organized to communicate along axes of varied interests, intellectual stamina, and disparately informed socio-historical consciousnesses. By harnessing the generic strengths of film, oral herstories, sociological non-fiction, extended fiction, poetry, and prose essays, Brand avoids mere recursion even as she circulates analogous information and perspectives in her works. She accomplishes this flexibility by articulating her narratives and analysis through the distinct linguistic registers that inhere in genres: their nuanced ideological frameworks shape her formulations. Such generic variety is vital to engendering a more complete understanding, across constituencies, of the Black history and presence elided in Canada's historical record.

Although the focus of this dissertation has centred principally on the interventions into hegemonic discourse that Brand's work poses within Canada, it also has relevance to North America at large, as well as to the Caribbean. In general, Brand seeks to deconstruct a pervasive ideology shaped, in the main, by the dialectic of capitalism, racism, and imperialism, a matrix that has structured the history of much of this continent. Brand has found it pragmatic to (re)fashion language and discourse by generic means—to flex language to expanded cognitive possibilities—in her articulate opposition to these structures.

One way into understanding what this (re)fashioning of language can mean is through the lens of Nicole Brossard, who points up what Teresa Zackodnik identifies as "the literal writing of the lesbian text as body" (Zackodnik 200). This "literal writing" is imbued with overtones both of creation—the conception of something original—and fabrication—the physical labour involved in generating a presence or substance not previously in existence. Brossard writes:

> Only through literally creating ourselves in the world do we declare our existence and from there make our presence known.... When I say literally give birth to ourselves in the world, I really do mean that literally. Literal means "that which is represented by letters." Taken literally. Taken to the letter. For we do take our

> bodies, our skin, our sweat, pleasure, sensuality, sexual bliss to the letter. From the letters forming these words emerge the beginnings of our texts. (134–35)

To take the lesbian body, and bring it "to the letter," implies a deep, attentive, and purposeful deliberation bent on transcribing the incorporeal into physical presence. This act of translation is one, unfortunately, that is also necessitated by reductive constructions of racial subjectivity.

While authenticating and affirming lesbian presence in the world of Black discourse and dominant ideology is indeed central to Brand's vocation—that is, bringing the pretermitted into popular consciousness and understanding; that is, humanizing the subaltern classes—it is of course only one facet of a larger articulative project. Nonetheless, Brossard's proposed method of parthenogenesis through language resonates powerfully with Brand's methodology and material output: "that which is represented by letters."

Against the Weltanschauung operative in Canada, which is organized at least in part around the suppression, if not the repudiation, of Blacks and people of colour, Brand fashions a counterhegemonic discourse in language that is differentially articulated by means of genre. To speak first of discourse, it is instructive to turn to Gramsci's understanding of the sociology of language. Salamini outlines Gramsci's thoughts on the subject: "Language is a political fact and instrument of politics. It aids in the development of a cultural social unity through the welding together of a multiplicity of dispersed wills in a common conception of the world" (Salamini 188). This "common conception" takes the form of "cultural 'climate,'" or Weltanschauung. As such, language, "far from being the subjective realization and expression of culture … is the expression of concrete interests of given groups." This is evident, for example, in the racially delimiting Received Standard English of Trinidad's British educational system, discussed in Chapter 4, and Canada's homogenized and homogenizing nation-narratives, examined particularly in Chapters 5 and 6. It stands to reason, therefore, that in order to instigate and foster an alternative "cultural 'climate,'" it is necessary, first, to develop an alternative discourse that reflects the "concrete interests of [a] given [group]"; second, it is essential to cultivate a sense of class consciousness and collectivity so that the articulation of that collectivity does indeed result in the "welding together of a multiplicity of dispersed wills."

While these processes that I have identified are dialectical, their order is not arbitrary. After all, as Salamini points out, the first phase of a group's political development begins when it recognizes its own unity of concerns but fails to conceptualize its commonality of interests with other groups (Salamini 58). A class can only move toward the hegemonic phase of development (in which a collectivity organizes as a political party and progresses to become a state) once it has gained awareness of the solidarity of interests that define its relationship with other political factions. The role of the organic intellectual, of course, is to provide subaltern groups with a conceptual framework that initially enables them to articulate their own understanding of their location and function within the relations of production; subsequently, the organic intellectual elaborates the connections between their own location and the positioning of other subaltern bodies.

In order to accomplish any of this, a discourse that differs from those which hegemonic forces deploy to define and manage their interests must be generated to express a subaltern group's "concrete interests," their distinction from those of the state. Language is inevitably derivative of the body's experience, whether individual or collectively organized. Brand sought out the language of her class amidst Black women, refined it through her participation in activism, in study groups, and in the Black Women's Collective in Toronto. Like Freire's insistence that "progressive educators have never to underestimate or reject knowledge had from [the educands'] living experience" (84), Brand recognizes that the valuable element of Gramsci's notion of the organic intellectual is "its articulation of a kind of attention that must always be paid to the masses of people.... the use of the *intelligence* of those masses of people" (Personal interview). About her own work and process, she says, "I think that that's probably what I tried to listen for."

Through her directorial role in filming documentaries, and with the publication of *No Burden to Carry*, Brand made public and accessible a people's language, as it expressed "the *intelligence* of those ... people." That language articulates and was shaped by the vital life-experiences that produced it. Like Brossard, then, whose "literal writing" is an amalgam of creation and manufacture, Brand has been a principal agent in Canada in the generation of original scholarly and creative materials that have contributed to a growing body of Black feminist herstorical scholarship, particularly in the mid- and late-1980s. She has, almost compulsively, taken this labour upon herself, individually and in collaboration with others. She has not done so as a martyr, but as one profoundly committed to the humanizing potential of the counterhegemonic narrative she draws from the Black community, the representation of which she identifies as primary and indispensable.

Salamini proposes, "[t]he source of 'meanings' in language is history, more specifically, the political praxis of a given group" (189). The cumulative body of Brand's output represents a discursive agenda that has evolved over time to speak dissenting, noncompliant truths to power, from the subaltern classes to hegemonic authorities. Her oeuvre has also evolved, particularly of late, to include a larger community of hegemony's conscientious objectors. Insofar as repression and exclusion are effected by the race, gender, and class constructions that many must confront, in an array of experiences and across a range of locations, the combination of genres that Brand engages with enable different modes of articulation to challenge those prohibitions. The compelling "*the* world"-nature of film and oral herstories; the patently instructive and persuasive spirit of sociological essays; the integrative capacity of fiction; poetry that is at once spare, vulnerable, sensual, and precise; and the associative character of non-fiction essays: each enables a different mode of linguistic address that is constitutive of community. Together, these genres respond to the need for a multiplicity of frameworks from within which to refine critical consciousness.

Critical trajectories

It is abundantly apparent to me that while this is a dissertation prepared in a department of English, there is a staunchly sociological component that runs throughout the work. This is not in itself surprising, since the conceptual framework of Gramsci's organic intellectual, within which I have located my analysis, is one that is bound intimately not only to the articulation of the proletariat's or subaltern class's critical consciousness, but to the transformation of society itself. I hope to have elucidated the processes by which the works produced by Brand can, in promoting critical class consciousness, effect changes in cognitive perceptions of the relations of production, deconstruct the divisive influences of hegemony as it acts through racism, sexism, and capitalism, and shed some light on the steps necessary for the oppressed to locate the oppressor and his ideology "outside" the self. I hope, too, that I have made clear some of the *actual* effects that Brand's work has had on given populations, as well as outline the contributions she has made to Black herstory as she has sought to satisfy outstanding needs, such as the remarkable outpouring of support she received at the Toronto premiere of *Older Stronger Wiser*, and the original source material she made accessible to the field of feminist research in the form of *No Burden to Carry*.

In the interest of developing my own critical and historical consciousness, three areas of elaboration and clarification suggest themselves as logical, further trajectories. The first trajectory would aim to assuage a concern with what I consider to be a gap in the critical material assessment of particular genres' efficacy with respect to generating social change. For example, while I can, in my examination of Brand's fiction and poetry, identify the mechanisms I believe to be productive of ideological change, it is nonetheless remarkably difficult, with the materials at hand, to demonstrate *how* and *what* change has actually transpired as a result of their influence. What are the pedagogical uses for her poetry and fiction? Is there a venue, other than the classroom, in which the socially (r)evolutionary potential of Brand's creative work could be made available and harnessed? In light of the feminist-materialist nature of her work, and with the model of the artist as social activist and reformer in mind, what is reasonable to expect of literature as a transformative tool? Chambers, of course, goes some of the way to answering the processes by which social change can be wrought by literature (though he does not elaborate on poetry specifically), but he does not address contexts or collaborative process within which change can be extended.

This breach is of interest to me because I believe Brand's work has transformative potential and I believe in the absolute necessity of the change it implicates. However, Freire consistently pushes the point home, in *Pedagogy of Hope*, that consciousness-raising is not adequate to the task of change. He writes:

> Although there can be no consciousness-raising (*conscientização*) without the unveiling, the revelation, of objective reality as the object of the cognition of the subjects involved in [the] process of consciousness-raising, nevertheless that revelation—even granting that a new perception flows from the fact of a reality laying itself bare—is not yet enough to render the consciousness-raising authentic…. Its authenticity is at hand only when the practice of the revelation of reality constitutes a dynamic and dialectical unity with the practice of transformation of reality. (102–03)

I harbour an interest in determining, in more concrete and less theoretical terms, the actual social change Brand's body of work has produced. In light of her own persistent efforts to combine political activism with artistic and analytical expression, this line of query is germane to the work I have so far produced. The possibility of some form of cross-disciplinary study, drawing from the field of sociology, would be of interest. That said, it also occurs to me that Brand would say, "Forget it. Get out to the barricades instead!"

A second trajectory of study evolves from the simultaneous breadth and specificity of the study at hand—that is, very nearly *all* of Brand's artistic and theoretical output, but *only* Brand's artistic and theoretical output, have been the subject of this dissertation. This focused work implicates the task of locating Brand's material in the context of the work of like-minded authors in Canada, and perhaps the Caribbean. Obvious choices would include Canada's Claire Harris and M. Nourbese Philip, Austin Clarke, and perhaps Rinaldo Walcott. Philips's current work in the area of the linguistics of legal discourse that saturate issues of race, immigration, and multiculturalism would seem to be a logical next step, developing from Brand's particular attention to the use of veiling, deflective language mobilized in national discussions of unity, origin, and "preserving" homogeneity. Also of interest might be Smaro Kamboureli's *Making a Difference: Canadian Multicultural Literature*. Jamaica's Erna Brodber, whose job as a social worker combines with her very active involvement in women's organizations, is also a possible connection.

Further development of this dissertation would aim to include a more focussed examination of the means by which Canada, and perhaps other nations, has sought to consolidate its myths of origin and the nation-narratives deployed to unify its populace. In that Brand's work frequently challenges the legitimacy and narrative integrity of totalizing nation-narratives, a more detailed assessment of hegemonically fortified narratives—surrounding issues such as immigration from predominantly non-Anglo and Anglo countries, the isolation and marginalization of Native peoples, and policies that actively organize social constructions of the nation—would look at those narratives with an eye to unloading their particular agendas and consequences. Again, Kamboureli's work, particularly *Scandalous Bodies: Diasporic Literature in English Canada*, might reasonably contribute to this study.

This study has explored Brand's at once measured and passionate artistic response to the long-standing oppressive and inequitable treatment of Black women in Canada. I have surveyed her efforts to generate awareness and critical consciousness of the cultural, economic, and political structures that perpetuate those inequalities. I have also sought to emphasize Brand's commitment to enable Black women to articulate their lived experiences in their own words and, in so doing, augment Canada's historical record in such a way that that chronicle cannot continue to elide their presence and herstory. Brand's discursive interventions, whether filmic, fictional, poetic, or prose-based, circulate within public and academic consciousness to the benefit of Canada's socio-cultural heterogeneity.

Coda

It is important to emphasize that, in speaking of "being more," or of humanization as ontological vocation of the human being, I am not falling into a fundamentalistic position—which, incidentally, is always conservative. Hence my equally heavy emphasis on the fact that this "vocation," this calling, rather than being anything a priori in history, on the contrary is something constituted in history. On the other hand, the striving for it, and the means of accomplishing it—which are also historical, besides varying from space-time to space-time—require, indisputably, the adoption of a utopia. Utopia, however, would not be possible if it lacked the taste for freedom that permeates the vocation to humanization. Or if it lacked hope, without which we do not struggle.

The dream of humanization, whose concretization is always a process, and always a becoming, passes by way of breach with the real, concrete economic, political, social, ideological, and so on, order, moorings that are condemning us to dehumanization. Thus the *dream* is a demand or condition that becomes ongoing in the history that we make and that makes and remakes us.

~Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of Hope* (99)

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Appendix A: Dionne Brand Films Transcripts

This appendix includes transcripts of Dionne Brand's four films: *Older Stronger Wiser*, *Sisters in the Struggle*, *Long Time Comin'*, and *Listening for Something ... Adrienne Rich and Dionne Brand in Conversation*. Although official transcripts are available through the archives of the National Film Board of Canada, I found my own transcripts differ in some respects—principally in the deciphering of particular words, the formatting of sentences as they appear on the page, and the indication of the inflection of contributors' spoken emphasis (by way of italicization), and attribution of comments (in *Sisters in the Struggle*).

Older Stronger Wiser

Director, Claire Prieto
Associate Director, Dionne Brand
National Film Board of Canada, Studio D
Women at the Well Series
28 minutes
1989

Narrator: From the moment of their first arrival in Canada, Black women, our foremothers, have been the backbone of our communities. They've taken in washing and ironing, worked in service, raised their own children *and* those of others. They have farmed land, worked in factories, taught schools, and worked in the church and community. Because of the colour of their skin, and because they were women, the rich record of their lives has been hidden from us. Here, then, are the lives of five women today; five portraits of commitment and struggle.

[National Film Board of Canada Presents *Older Stronger Wiser*.]

Narrator: It's the fortieth anniversary of coach Dolores Shadd's basketball team, the Red Dragons.

Dolores Shadd: Back in the early '40s, after high school, I decided I wanted to be a nurse. I wanted to join the cadet corps. I found that the only place that a coloured person could go would be in the southern part of the United States, so I decided against it.

Narrator: Born in Dresden, Ontario, Dolores went to school in Detroit while coaching young women at a community centre.

Dolores Shadd: I had five basketball teams. The Chinese team were the Red Dragons. I had a Mexican Spitfire team, Jiving Jills, the Hotshots, and one other team.

Narrator: Dolores and the Red Dragons withstood the colour bar, their friendship given strength by overcoming injustice. For this reunion, they've come from as far as Hawaii.

Team member: In forty years we'll all come with our children pushing our wheelchairs. (*laughter*)

Other team member: If we're here....

Dolores Shadd: You're optimistic. (More laughter.)

Narrator: For the last thirty years, Dolores Shadd has been a farmer. Working the land first tilled by early Black settlers, she and her husband, Ed, live on their farm near Chatham in south-western Ontario. Today, Dolores sits on the board of the National Farmers Union. She travels across the country—and the world—on behalf of farmers. But all this came long after her first attempt at farming.

Dolores Shadd: When I first got married we had a few chickens. And Ed said, "Well, you know, my mother used to raise chickens; that was her spending money." Well, I liked chickens and I tried it, and I soon found out—well, at first, I broke more eggs than I took to market because I was a little rough and they would crack and they'd break in my hands. All kinds of problems till I learned how to handle the eggs, maybe, more gently. But I discovered I was robbing Peter to pay Paul: time I bought laying mash and shells, and etcetera, I wasn't making any money. So the chickens went.

It is a good profession if you like growing things, like being outside. I think it's the only profession in which dad and mom are always present. The children can look out across the field and see dad out there.

Narrator: Dolores also remembers the closeness of the Black farming community in the old days, and the camaraderie of the women.

Dolores Shadd: You didn't have money to pay five or six or seven men to bring a team of horses and their wagon, so we shared. Then there'd be agreement that that thrash machine would do all the thrashing for all the farmers on that particular road. And then the women of that area would come and help the farm wife with the cooking. Then two or three days later, you went to the next farm. And then I remember when something called a combine came up, and that meant that was the end of that particular era. There was no more thrashing, or sense of excitement of farm women working together, getting big meals and maybe taking two or three days on your farm. It now meant that one person would operate the combine, and you'd need someone else maybe to drive the wagons away or to load it into a bin. And this cut down on the amount of work and the big meals that the farm women had to get. And, yeah, I think we miss that togetherness and sharing.

Narrator: Woman director of her farm district, Dolores is passionate about the concerns of farmers locally and worldwide.

Dolores Shadd: One of the things is the low prices that we get, and we've often discussed it as farm women. What would happen if we farm women drove that tractor to the mill and said: "We must have $8." And we don't get it, we leave. Now one of the things I find that farmers are resentful [of] the multi-nationals using our food as a weapon against third-world countries. There's a food-dollars shortage because they don't have the money to buy the food. If we ourselves could distribute our food and not let the multi-nationals use it, we could wipe the famine off the earth in about two days. There'd be no need for anyone to starve.

Woman #1: I hollered and hollered and they wouldn't move until I came out and rattled the chain and they took off, and then they took off and nearly threw me off the binder.

Narrator: These farm women, younger and older, are descendants of women who fled the tyranny of slavery, to hew a freedom out of Ontario farmland.

Dolores Shadd: You hesitate to even hope that one of your children will want the farm because you know they can't make it. And according to the government it takes four hundred acres for about four people, and most of us have less than that to live on.

Woman #1: It's a good feeling until you get to the mill and they don't give you enough for your crops to pay the cost of production. And it's nice for the young people now—they have tractors. When I started, was in the Dirty Thirties, and I had to drive a team of horses.

Grace Fowler: Tell me about it! You sell your eggs for 35¢ a dozen then go in the store and buy 'em for about a buck and a half a dozen. You know darn well it isn't the farmers gettin' it. I used to get in more arguments at work with our chef. He always talking about the rich farmers.

Woman #2: I get tired of hearing that.

Grace Fowler: I told him they are not rich. "Yeah, well, they're driving big cars and they got all that machinery." I said, the bank just lets them drive those cars and use that machinery.

Woman #1: That's right. Yeah.

Narrator: Born in Manitoba, Grace Fowler, like most Black women of her time, has worked since her early teens.

Grace Fowler: Well, when I was fourteen I… I was fourteen in December. In January I got a job, working for this man. I was working for board and room, and clothes. Ah, they fed me real good. And I did everything: I fed horses, curried horses, slopped hogs, milked cows, cleaned barns, cut wood, worked in the house, you know, washing ... you know, I was a farm help, and because I was a girl I did both jobs. This was near Beausejour; that's about 50 miles out of Winnipeg. And it was pretty rough goin'. See, this is back in Depression time I'm talkin' about.

Narrator: After working as a busgirl in Winnipeg in the 30s, when Black women were refused work as waitresses, Grace moved to Toronto in 1944. The war signalled the first time that Black women in Canada were allowed employment in factories.

Grace Fowler: So I got a job in the war plant. I worked on what they called the high explosives side, uh, where you got paid a little extra because you were working with dangerous powders. We made, um, detonators for torpedoes. And, it wasn't a bad job. I learned every job on the line because it was awful boring just to stay in one. Some of the women stayed in one job all the time they were there. But I made the rounds: learned 'em all.

I know there's prejudice all over Canada, but I never ran into prejudice in Winnipeg like I did in Toronto. I remember one time, I'd just come back to work … took a week off, trying to find another place to live. And I had been knocking on doors, having doors slammed in my face. One day after we'd been out all day long, I got on the street car right at, oh, 5 o'clock, you know, when everybody's gettin' off work. Hanging on a strap. Tired, I'm frustrated, I'm angry, and then some *clown* in the back of the streetcar says, "That's the first time I saw a nigger with freckles." I was goin' down there and *snatch* somebody, but my husband said, "Just ignore them, they're all ignorant."

Narrator: After the war, Grace and her husband began farming and raised four children just outside of Buxton.

Grace Fowler: Once a year we got a baby-sitter so we could go to the Labour Day dance. Other than that, you took your kids with you. Like they used to have square dances down in Buxton—you took the kids. When they got bigger, they square danced. When they were babies you stayed home 'cause you didn't have time to go … didn't have the energy to go to dances. And basically you didn't have the money. 'Cause you know, railroad men, until A. Philip Randolph come in and organized 'em, used to only get $80 a month.

I always fight for the underdog. I was the only scrapper in our family. Like, if somebody was pushin' my brothers and sisters around, well then, I would take up for them. And I been doin' that for the rest of my life.

Narrator: To struggle for the underdog is a lesson history teaches *all* Black women. It led Grace to become a union activist and president of the Kent County NDP.

Grace Fowler: The working man needs all the help he can get, 'cause he's carrying this country on his back. Rich man's got all kind of loopholes. And they [the NDP] are also for the people that are on a fixed income. 'Cause right now I pay almost as much income tax as I did when I was working. And to me, that doesn't seem fair, when I've paid income tax since 1939. You'd think right by now, I'd have paid my dues.

Narrator: Once in a while, Grace comes here to this land, land invested with much of her labour, much of her life.

Through the ceremony of toil, the indignities of race, for *all* of us, the Black church was refuge: home.

The first woman to be ordained in the British Methodist Episcopal [BME] Church, Reverend Addie Aylestock served this same Buxton community for eight years. Today, she has come back for a special service.

Addie Aylestock: The first ministry I had was Owen Sound. I was already there as a deaconess. And I was there for another two years, and then I was appointed to North Buxton. And they graciously accepted me. When I first came, I say, the salary wasn't very much, because the farmers weren't getting much for their produce then. They were very good at seein', of course, that I was taken care of, because they would bring me chickens, and the meat from the pigs and the cows.

[Footage of Addie Aylestock at the church pulpit, speaking.]

Addie Aylestock: It surely is a delightful experience for me to be here at this service. After pastoring here for quite a number of years and then going away, and be able to return, too, it seems like home. You that attended the services when I pastored here, and since then, no doubt, at different meetings, you have heard me quote quite frequently, "He is able to do exceeding, abundantly above all that we can ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us." I often quoted that—feeling that that was a special verse that the Lord had given me—of course, quite a number of years ago.

Narrator: Reverend Aylestock received the spiritual call when she was nine years old.

Addie Aylestock: I didn't feel any different to begin with, but afterwards I started reading the Bible and I felt that reading the Lord had come in my heart; I felt the peace within.

Narrator: At eighteen she joined the BME in Toronto, committing her life to giving out the word of God. Soon after, she became a deaconess, travelling, doing missionary work in Black communities in Montreal and Africville, Halifax.

Addie Aylestock: When the resolution was put at the conference to ordain women there was a little opposition then, but the majority were in favour. But I never had any difficulty in any of the churches because I was a woman.

Narrator: Only the second woman minister in Canadian history, those pioneering days tested her resolve.

Addie Aylestock: I had never lived alone in a house before. And when I came to North Buxton, I remember it was a Saturday and my cousin came to help me clean up the parsonage, which was across the road from the church. And then I begin to wonder how am I going to stay here all night by myself? I thought of asking her to stay, or could I have gone to her place. And I said: "No. I'm going to ask the Lord to take care of me *now*. I'm going to start right off."

Narrator: A woman at the centre of her church and her community, Rev. Aylestock's *singular* mission has been to do the spiritual work which has been so healing to her people.

Addie Aylestock: I was dedicated to the Lord. I felt I had plenty opportunities to get married, but I felt I really couldn't do justice to the Lord's work. And so I had plenty of opportunities, but I felt the Lord wanted me to continue on as I am. And I'm still happy. I have tried to retire several times, but it seems like it isn't the Lord's will. I will continue on doing what I can for Him.

Narrator: Bathurst Street: the heart of the largest Black community in Canada. Gwen Johnston: her family dates [from] the 1860s in Toronto. She, and Lennie Johnston, her husband, run the Third World Bookstore, begun with their small savings twenty years ago. In the Toronto of her childhood, Gwen knew that our people's past was missing.

Gwen Johnston: When we were going to school, here in Canada, there was nothing.... We didn't come across any Black books until we were in our late teens, early twenties really.

Narrator: It was at the *height* of the Black Power Movement that Gwen and Lennie first opened their store. The fight for civil rights and African liberation spread internationally, gripping the growing Black community of Toronto.

Gwen Johnston: The Sixties was a very exciting time for Black people. The store was always full of people looking for information. They came to get books for themselves and for their children, and people brought the newspapers—community newspapers—and flyers to be distributed. We had a wonderful time at Third World.

Narrator: Gwen Johnston comes from a long line of women who face the hardships of being Black in Canada.

Gwen Johnston: My grandmother's name was Rosetta Amos, and then when she married she was Rosetta Amis-Richardson. She raised a family of seven children, but she wasn't a person ever to complain about life situations: she just went at it and did what she could.

Narrator: For her great-grandmother, her grandmother, her mother, for Gwen, and most Black women in those days, domestic work was the *only* work available. And for them, labour outside the home was a necessity.

Gwen Johnston: There was very little money at home, so I just quit school and went to work. I started working, oh, I guess about at age fifteen. And, um, luckily, I did have *fairly* good people to work for. My mother was very fussy about *who* I would go to work for. She told me a lot of things to watch for; and people who she thought would take advantage she'd say, "No, don't take that job." So, I did have some places that were quite nice, some families that had small children. And I looked after the children, but I did everything else, too: the cooking and … they did have usually somebody to come in and do the heavy cleaning.

Twenty-five dollars a month was considered a fairly good wage. Before that you sort of had to work up to twenty-five dollars a month; before that it was even less. Also, the women who went out and worked by the day: they earned a dollar a day, and carfare. Sometimes they were given their lunch, sometimes they weren't. And they worked *very* hard: they would be expected to come in and clean a whole house in some cases. In a day. For a dollar a day. Can you imagine that? Very, very, very hard work.

[Gwen Johnston in Third World Books, serving a young Black boy. Johnston says: "You'll enjoy this book. Malcolm X was a great man."]

Narrator: Gwen is determined that our culture will not be lost again. She and Lennie provide today's Black children with books about their history.

Gwen Johnston: We feel that we have introduced our people to a lot of marvellous reading, and it's very important that our children, our young people, be introduced to their history and culture, which was lost to us for so long.

Eva Smith: I grew up in a small community and my grandparents and my parents were always involved both in the church, in the community, and in the school. And it became a part of my lifestyle. So when I came to Canada, I became involved with the church and in the community.

Narrator: If labour outside the home took the measure of these women's lives, leadership in the community was imperative. Eva Smith came to Canada in 1955, on the West Indian Domestic Workers Scheme. Many Black women were recruited through this scheme to work in white Canadian households.

Eva Smith: The salary was, for most people, uh, sixty dollars a month. Fifteen dollars a week! And there were people who… you had to be up—and though you live in the same house—when the employer, husband and wife, gone out, and you're babysitting, even if it's until six o'clock in the morning—you better be sitting up when they arrive. And you must be up, also, at seven o'clock to get breakfast. And so those were some of the things: people weren't getting proper time off, there was no one to speak up for them.

Woman #3: People had their *passports* taken away from them. Their clothing taken away. And they couldn't go out unless they went out with the employer. You know, things like shovelling snow in a sweater and sandals.

Narrator: Still they came, out of need and circumstance, and this is where Eva's community organizing began.

[Eva smith can be heard in the background to say "… need to give them that kind of information…."]

Narrator: The most precious part of *any* Black community is its children. And Eva's vision of community had deepened through those early years of isolation. *Still* working at a full-time job, she began teaching Black heritage.

Eva Smith: I can recall many nights I would get home from Jane Bench, and reach here by, say, 10:30, get a cup of coffee, and be out to work. Some mornings I would get home, and be out there—like on a Saturday morning—and be out there for that programme. Young St. was really, say, half of the journey. And many times I would say to myself, "Woman, you got to be crazy. Where are you going in this weather?" But when I arrive there, and see all these kids standing outside, I was very glad that I did go.

Because most of the kids, they are from the Islands where they're not accustomed to apartment living, and so other than that, they would be hanging around in the corridor, or in the plaza, where they would get involved with the police. So, that Saturday morning programme was an outlet for them, a place where they could go and feel at ease.

Eva Smith: [Reading "Who's in Rabbit's House?" to a class of Black children of various ages.]

"Long, long ago, a rabbit lived on a bluff overlooking a lake. A path went by her door and down to the bank … to the water…."

"'Come out at once!' She banged on the door: Bang! Bang! Bang! But the bad animal said more crossly than before, 'Go away, or I will trample on you.' And the rabbit sat down on a nearby log, to think."

[Eva Smith asks the children, "What do you think about what's going on in…?"]

Narrator: Believing that education would free Black people from the bonds of inequality; it is twenty years since those first classes, and Eva is still working, still teaching.

Tonight is the Eva Smith Bursary Awards. This is a tribute to her vigilance, and a gift of love from the young people whom she has taught.

Woman # 4: “She is dedicated to the advancement of our community….

Narrator: So rarely honoured for their commitment and struggle, Black women like Eva, Gwen, Addie, Grace, and Dolores shape a legacy for us all to carry.

Eva Smith: Presenting an award to a young Black man.] “On behalf of all of us here, and your friends, please accept this as a token of our appreciation for your commitment and your hard work. [In a mockingly stern voice] We are expecting great things of you!”

There was a rule in my family: what hurt one of us, hurt all of us. And that attitude I have taken with me and have helped the kids to understand. Even, sometimes, I remember, students who are at an advanced level—there’s always a feeling that, “Well, *I’m* not a part of those kids.” And I always say to them: “When you walk down the corridor, the first thing that comes to someone’s mind: You *are* a *Black* child. They don’t stop to ask whether you are in advance, whether you’re from Jamaica, whether you’re from Trinidad, or whether you’re a Canadian. You are all in the same boat. Therefore: what hurt one of us, hurt all of us.

Credits:

Research – Claire Prieto, Dionne Brand, Noelle Richardson
Narrator – Marva Jackson
Camera Assistants – Mitch Ness, Véronique Lehouck, Durwin Partridge, and Lynnie Johnstone
Additional Director – Claire Prieto
Associate Director – Dionne Brand
Cinematography – Joan Hutton
Sound Recording – Dianne Carrière
Written by – Dionne Brand
Editor – Ginny Stikeman
Production Coordinator – Lana Lovell

Sound – David Lee, Peter Clements, and Peter Sawade
Additional Camera – Deborah Parks, Durwin Partridge
Electrician – Jan Madlener
Production Stills – Cheryl Crawley, Roger McTair
Post Production Assistant – Lana Lovell
1960s Still Photos – Clair Prieto, Roger McTair
Archival Photographs courtesy of Mrs. Velma Adamson, Rev. A. Aylestock, Mr. Daniel Braithwaite, Mrs. Elise Davis, Mrs. Gurtrude Davis, Mrs. Lois De Shield, Mrs. Valeiri Hunt, Mrs. Gwen Johnston, Mr. Homer La Fayette, Mrs. Jean Markham, and Mrs. Dolores Shadd
Animation Camera – Meta Media
Original Music by Faith Nolan
Performed by Faith Nolan, Sherry Shute
Vocals and arrangement by Faith Nolan of "Farther Along" © 1937 Stamps-Baxter Music Co. BMI – used by permission.
Music Recording – John Whynot
Music Editing – Diane Le Floc'h
Sound Editing – Clare Bambrough
Re-Recording – Shelley Craig
Studio Clerks – Sophie T. Lindsay, Linda Paris Quillinan
Unit Administrator – Gisèle Guilbault
Producer – Ginny Stikeman
Executive Producer – Rina Fraticelli

Special Thanks to – The women who participated in the making of this film and Oral History Project—Immigrant Women's Job Placement Centre, Toronto.
Ontario Black History Society
North American of Black Historical Museum

Older Stronger Wiser is a production of Studio D, National Film Board, Canada
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Sisters in the Struggle

Directors, Dionne Brand and Ginny Stikeman
National Film Board of Canada, Studio D
Women at the Well Series
49:23 minutes
1991

[Speakers, in order of their appearance.]

Akua Benjamin – Activist, Black Action Defense Committee
Dionne Falconer – Black Women's Collective
Carolyn Jerome – Vancouver Union Activist
Linda Carty – Black Women's Collective
June Veecock – Ontario Federation of Labour
Leleti Tamu – Black Women's Collective
Carolann Wright – Nova Scotia Anti-poverty candidate
Carol Allain – Black Women's Collective
Rosemary Brown – Politician
Amanthe Bathalien – Community activist / Montréal
Sherona Hall – Activist, Black Action Defense Committee
Angela Robertson – Black Women's Collective

Akua Benjamin: We have *always* had fighters in our community. We have always … I mean *that*, that, I think, is the basis of our survival. We have always had women doing the kinds of stuff that I've been doing. They're not in anybody's textbooks, they've not been celebrated in any degree, but I think that our survival, to a large extent, has depended on *women*.

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Dionne Falconer: All people of colour in this country, I mean, they were bombarded by this kind of … you know, the racism here, and this constant kind of, you know, the verbalization of it all too, right? In a very … in the most abusive way possible.

Carolyn Jerome: You know, you have to look at things how *white* people look at them, and then you have to then think: "Well, this is how *I* would look at them." So I think you're constantly—when you examine things—you look at it through two sets of eyes. *How* you are supposed to see it or how they would like you to see it, and then how your *experience* forms your vision and how you see that.

Linda Carty: To fight against racism and *not* to fight against sexism is to defeat the purpose, you know, of being whole human beings, of *being*, you know?

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June Veecock: I think it's important for Black women to be involved with the struggle against sexism. I mean after all *we're* women—some of our white sisters forget that—that we *are* women. But I think in order to be effective in that broader struggle, within the women's movement, I think there has to be a place for Black women to come together *collectively*. In order to be more *effective* in that broad movement.

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Leleti Tamu: I see in our history that Black women before me wanted to know: when is enough? When is this change going to come? But the one thing that I've always ended with: that if not in my lifetime, then in my sister's lifetime, or my children's lifetime. But *their* lifetime. And that the struggles Black women before us *did*, helps us to be in the struggle now.

* * *

[The National Film Board of Canada, Studio D, Presents *Sisters in the Struggle*.]

[Leleti Tamu's "Sisters in the Struggle" serves as background music.

Sisters in the struggle yeah yeah yeah yeah yeah
Sisters in the struggle yea-yeah

They're struggling in the food lines,
They're struggling in the job lines,
They're struggling in the welfare lines,
They're in the abortion lines.

Sisters in the struggle, yeah,
Sisters in the struggle is what we are….

Camera focuses on parts of a large collage that comprises newspaper headlines: "Black rebellion," "Good enough to stay," "Fight …," "Shoots police …," "Sophia determined… [to] fight" (with picture).]

[Picture of a Black Workers Alliance gathering, right arms raised. "Black feminists united." Banner carried in a long march reads "Women's Coalition Against Racism and Police Violence." Words of the large collage read "Black Action Defense Committee," "Sexism = Violence," "Protesters in black killing / a victory rally today," "Cops!" Picture of newspaper articles "No Justice! No Peace!"]

Carolyn Jerome: My father was a porter on the railroad, on the CNR, and my mother basically was a homemaker, and supplemented, you know, our home by doing odd work all through the years. In Winnipeg we grew up in a predominantly French community, where we didn't speak the language. So, my family became my best friends; my brother and sisters became my best friends. Because not only were we different, and there was that kind of isolation that set in for us, but we also didn't speak the language.

Carolann Wright: The Black communities in Nova Scotia were segregated. I mean, people relate the Jim Crow laws to United States and somehow it's not talked about here as Jim Crow laws or segregation laws. But if you look at the geographic areas—the Black communities—that's in fact what it was: segregation. The Black communities are all situated outside, you know, the hub of activity in the core cities. And all the, you know, where all the work is, immediate work, all the shopping centres, what have you. And they're *miles*, sometimes, from the cities. So, that is *one* way, I mean: that still exists today. So if people are disputing the idea of segregation in *Canada*: one way's to go to Nova Scotia and look at where the Black communities are.

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[Black Women's Collective. Toronto. Picture of group in discussion.]

Carol Allain: But I remember when I first came up to Canada. You know, I went to my first public school and I remember it was winter and I was thirteen. I don't know, I can't remember what happened in the schoolyard, but I remember fighting with this little white girl, and then ended up being surrounded by this *whole* group of kids. Next thing I know, this girl's *grandmother* is here with this *hockey* stick. And I'm trying to protect my two sisters, so they're standing behind me; I'm *scared* out of my mind. I didn't know what to do. And this woman is, like, *screaming* in my face, calling me "nigger" and "go back from where you come from." And the funny thing is, this woman has this serious heavy accent, you know? And she's telling me, like, go back to where I come from, and I was thirteen, and I didn't know what to say to this woman. So I grab my sisters and run, you know; I went home to my mother. And then I got home and then she sat the three of us dawn and says, "Well, you know, this is what you're gonna have to deal with for your whole life." And I think: I don't want to deal with this for my whole life.

Dionne Falconer: But that's the reality of living in a country such as Canada.

Carol Allain (cont.): It's even funnier that my six year-old niece is having problems in school, right. White kids are spitting on her, punching her—in school. I mean, I'm not gonna tell her, "Well, you know, don't just get upset." I said, "punch them back; spit back in their face. You know, I'll come and hold them while you hit them. I mean, what: she has to learn, you know, she has to learn to defend herself. I mean, it's starting so young.

Leleti Tamu: When I came I landed in Vancouver. And in a school of, like, three hundred kids I was the *only* Black kid. And I was the only Black kid that just came off the boat, basically, 'cause I had *strong*, *strong* patois accent. Everything was a joke, you know; they ask me a question in class and I hold up my hand and answer, and soon as I answer everybody'd just start to laugh. And during recess and stuff, it was always, the games always turn into jigaboo and chocolate milk and Aunt Jemima. I used to go home at first and tell my mother. My mother said, "You know what—go *back* to the schoolyard." She says, "You go *back* to the school and you kick their asses." My mother would come to school, there, and stand up at the gate with her coat and her big, big scarf on. And she'd stand there and then she said, "Fight."

[Footage of Blacks walking along the crowded streets of Toronto.]

Linda Carty: I remember when I used to work, you know, part-time in hospitals, and I'm coming home. Midnight. *Always* when the subway opens, and the subway cars open: Black women coming in. Similarly, if you're going to work—six o'clock in the morning, five-thirty in the morning: Black women getting out of the subway. Always, and you look, and these are *older* women. And you look and you say, "God, these are all mothers and grandmothers. What the hell are they doing?" Like, when the whole world, when the perfect white world in this country is asleep, Black women are working.

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Rosemary Brown: Unlike Black men who can say, "I can't find a job because I'm Black," Black women can always find a job in people's kitchens. They can always find a job cleaning people's houses, washing people's toilets. They can *always* find a job doing cheap labour in factories. So they can always work. What racism proscribes is the kind of job they can find. So that in order to get the better job, they have to be better qualified. You have to be better qualified as a woman, and you have to be better qualified as a Black woman, for any job that you would care to apply for. So it's a double burden that you carry.

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Amanthe Bathalien: [Speaking in French, with English subtitles] I arrived here August 1, 1970. It was two months before the October Crisis in Québec. It made an impression on me because I'd just left a country that was under a reign of terror. The October Crisis made me relive what I'd left behind.

As for work, my first job was as a domestic. When women come here our priority is to find work to take care of our family and to better our existence. So women have to find work as fast as possible, taking any kind of job, whatever it pays.

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June Veecock: I think Black women have always worked. I mean, Black women have *always* worked. I mean in the West Indies, in talking with immigrant Black women, I mean women have always *worked*. You had extended family to care for the child or the children, and women have always gone out to work. It is not a choice for Black women. You have to work to make ends meet. I mean there's no choice. And I often wonder how Black women survive in this country.

[Footage of Black women on busy Toronto streets. (I'm left with an uncomfortable sense of essentializing going on. Do the women know they are being filmed simply because they are Black women—as "exemplars" of what Black women look like, who they are? How is the category made not monolithic?)]

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Dionne Falconer: The labour market: it's gender-segregated and it's also racially segregated. Therefore, by having Black people, you know, and particularly Black women [available as workers], therefore you can put them at the *lowest* and exploit them the *most*.

Leleti Tamu: You need the workers to keep the system going. And I think that they do it all over the world, where they have certain sections of society: they have to keep them there because if they don't have these workers what they're trying to maintain is going to fall apart. So they need to have the underpaid, need to have the people that they import especially for these jobs. And still send out the message they're coming to take your jobs. Coming to take what jobs?

[Still photo of meeting, with chanting of "Good enough to work; good enough to stay!" Newspaper article headline reads "Black women being deported to ease job market, group says."]

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Sherona Hall: Well, there was a time in Canada when … and most North American and European countries … [when] there was a need for domestics; you know, people to clean white people's homes and tend their children. And of course, they usually looked to the poor, Third World nations whenever they have this kind of need. And so Jamaica was one of the countries favoured for recruitment of these kinds of women.

One of the requirements of the agreement that was signed between the Jamaican government and the Canadian government was that these women should be single—of course, not have any husbands, and *no* dependent children or any such appendages. But of course, the women were *instructed*, at the time, by people who were recruiting them, that they should *not* declare the children or they would not get a chance to go. It was never *raised* before. The *thousands* of women who had applied for their children to become landed immigrants in Canada and had not been confronted with that *fact*—that they had not declared the children on their original application.

[Newspaper article headline reads "7 women fight against deportations." Chanting: "Stop the deportations now!" Placards read "Here to stay, Here to fight!" and "Stop the Deportation of Jamaican Mothers."]

Sherona Hall (cont.): It was a *very* hard time to be struggling for *any* kind of rights in this country. It was a *very*, *very* difficult time. Because it seems like the system just gone against Black people, just gone against immigrant people.

[Chanting: "Good enough to work, Good enough to stay!" Newspaper articles' headlines read "Blacks to appeal deportation orders," "Jamaican women try last bid to stay here," and "Black women deportation to ease job market, group says." Newspaper photo pictures shows five Black women and two children.]

Sherona Hall (cont.): Telegrams were sent from just about every single province in this country to the prime minister to rescind those deportation orders that had already been issued, and not to issue anymore.

[Newspaper article headline reads, "Seven Jamaican mothers get deportation reprieve."]

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Rosemary Brown: Racism is out in the open. The traditional polite Canadian racism, which I first contacted in the 1950s, no longer exists. It is now out in the open. Which is, in a way, is good because we can deal with it. It's right out there now. It's evident in justices in the courts, it's evident in the way in which the police respond to issues around race, it's evident in the way in which our school system [sic], it's evident in government policies around what happens to the native communities, whether it's on their land claims issues or any other issue in which they have to deal with the federal government. It's out there now.

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[Moving film footage of a City of Toronto police car—lights and siren on—going down a street. Chanting: "Weed out racist cops! Out, out racist cops!" Newspaper articles' headlines read "Inquest jury unanimous Officer cleared in Evans death," "Man fatally shot inside his home by police officer" (Albert Johnson), and "Two policemen are acquitted by jury in Johnson shooting." Chanting of "What do we want: justice! When do we want it: now!"]

Sherona Hall: Well the police is the arm of the state that is usually *used* to intimidate. They took on a particular stance in the 70s, because, well, the police was acquitted after the Buddy Evans murder—was never charged after the inquest: was never charged. And then, of course, they went on to murdering another Black man in the city, Albert Johnson. But then, the reaction to that murder by community actually reigned in the police for a good ten years. Because, they did not *expect* that kind of over-pouring of *anger* from the Black community over that killing as it had occurred. It caused them to step back and make a reassessment of what it is that they were faced with in terms of resistance.

[Chanting of "Justice for Buddy Evans! Justice for Albert Johnson!" Newspaper articles' headlines read "Rally held in Mississauga / Community protests killing," "Brutality charges: History repeats itself in York shooting for victim, police officer, even street," and "Protesters assail police shooting." Placard reads "Police Lawlessness."]

Sherona Hall (cont.): And then we had the murder of Lester Donaldson, you know, and then, soon after that, there was Wade Lawson. Within a month, there was Wade Lawson, and then another year later we have the Sophia Cook situation.

[Newspaper articles' headlines read "No reason for police to shoot, family of dead teenager says," "Police shooting of woman protester: [gun/pistol] drawn 'as soon as black person sighted,' demonstrator says," and "No racism cited in Montreal slaying of unarmed teen."]

Amanthe Bathalien: [Speaking in French, with English subtitles.] About everyone in the white community reacted against the Black community after the Anthony Griffin affair. It's as through they said: "The Blacks are upset and demonstrating, but Anthony Griffin wasn't a saint." They didn't understand that the reason we were so shocked wasn't because we felt he was a saint. But because this unarmed young man just standing there got a bullet in his head because the police said he "threatened to run!"

[Newspaper article headline reads "Un exécution pure et simple." Chanting, "No justice, no peace." Picture of Anthony Griffin in the paper, with the headline "Slaying of teen an outrage to all, priest tells 300 mourners at service." "Griffin n' était un ange, ni un bandit."]

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Akua Benjamin: I think adolescents, in particular, do not have any place in which to make mistakes in this country. Whereas, you know, in where we came from that kids could hang out, they could "lime," you know, they can do the kind of things, they can make mistake. Somebody in those countries will pick them up, pull them up. Here, if a kid gets out of line, he may end up dead.

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Dionne Falconer: Last November, when Michael Wade Lawson was killed, I mean, there was sort of, you know, it was out in the suburbs where … you know, a lot of people live out there. They figure, "Well, racism doesn't touch me out here. I mean, hey, life is safe and secure out here." And yet here he was, a Black child, out there in the suburbs, and he was shot-killed by a police officer, right? And so it's like, it's sort of all coming around, saying, you know, "Really, you are not safe anywhere you go."

Leleti Tamu: You know, when I heard that Sophia Cook was shot, I thought, you know, "Fuck. Here's something else." Because for so long all the shootings have been

Black brothers, and we were always there for that. But, there was never a woman shot, you know, in this kind of situation … and, you know, and recently? You know. And I just found all this anger coming up, from all the other stuff: I'm saying, "On top of everything else, they're fucking shooting us down now too."

[Moving film footage of women out at Bathurst Station getting people, including many Black children, to sign petitions to end police violence.]

Linda Carty: We are organizing, we are angry, you know, we are disturbed and everything because the cops keep shooting down Black people. But we also recognize that *other* peoples in this society are experiencing harassment by police. And we looked across the country and we saw similar things going on, happening with Native people. Violence, by the police, happening to native people. We look at the J. J. Harper shooting, and we see what the inquiry is all about: it's *all* racism, yeah? It's *all* racism by the state; it's all the forceful arm of the state sitting on all peoples who seem powerless.

[Silent. Black and white photos of angry/ sad/ shocked people of colour, young and old.]

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Akua Benjamin: The issue, the crux for us, is that the police organization is reflective of a *dying* type of bureaucratic structure. That is, it impedes justice—not just for Blacks—but for everybody who comes up against that system. And there has to be new methods in terms of policing, there has to be ways in which, in a democratic society, that you can have a police force that is *accountable*, that can act in a just and impartial manner. And it is that aspect that the government does not want to look at all.

[More footage of city street scenes.]

Akua Benjamin (cont.): All the institutions have been framed in a mono-cultural framework. You know, they've been set up by the British, you know, hundreds of years ago. These are the institutions that have been shaped in a way which captures the sentiments, the norms, the values of mainstream society. Despite the fact that Native peoples have been here eons and eons ago, they are not shaping any institution. They are left *out* of that by virtue of racism. And then along, if you look again, the Chinese who are here—who built the railroad—they haven't shaped any institution. Their norms, their values are not, you know, intricately tied into any one of these institutions. And *we* are saying that in 1989, going into the 90s, and going into the twenty-first century: "How can you continue to have these dinosaurs? You know. Keeping people out—their input and their values and their customs and ideas." It runs counter to this whole notion of multiculturalism. I don't believe in it, very much, but it runs contrary to that whole direction of government policy, saying that there is diversity. Diversity: but where does that diversity play itself out?

[Moving film footage pans from a tarpaulin-made tent that is set up in a small public park—with a sign propped in front of it that reads "Respect Native Sovereignty"—to a building that appears to be a local government building, in Toronto.]

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Amanthe Bathalien: [Speaking in French, with English subtitles.]

[Still photographs of a street protest.]

Amanthe Bathalien: [Speaking in French, with English subtitles.] They're very afraid of "disappearing," as they say. They say they're afraid of their culture disappearing. They're afraid that the white race will not be as visible as it is now.

[Headline in a newspaper editorial section: "Quebec's all-white image."]

Amanthe Bathalien: [cont.] We have a lot in common with the *Québécois*. We were colonized by the same French colonizers. We inherited part of the culture of France. But I believe *Québécois* society is uneasy with the Haitian community because we're Third World people, because we're Black. They consider us immigrants who can't be integrated, who can never become part of this society. If it's on the basis of colour, it's true: we'll never be part of this society because we'll never be white.

[Newspaper editorial section: "Quebec's all-white image."]

Amanthe Bathalien (cont.): They say they want to defend their language. They have every right to, and we'll join them as Francophones. We'll be there with them to help protect the language. But they won't accept us as allies even to defend the language since they don't consider us "integratable." It's just the colour of our skin that's the big difference.

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[Banner reads, "Fight the powers that be, by any means necessary," "No more patriarchy."]
[Song being sung: "Sister walk to the left—watch out for the right; they want freedom for our people as we fight for our lives."]

Sherona Hall: I grew up in one of the poorest areas of the city of Kingston, called Rockfort—you know, in between Waricker Hill, two seconds from the open ocean—where I saw poverty and violence in a very concrete way, malnutrition among the children—I became very, very active at fourteen. I mean, *really very*, very active.

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Rosemary Brown: It was my aunt, who considered herself a Fabian socialist, who tried to explain some of these ideas which I had garnered from my grandmother and from my parents about decency, social justice, humanitarian fairness, these kinds of things. She was the one who actually conceptualized it and said, as a Fabian socialist, these are the things that we believe in. Then of course once I got involved with the New Democratic Party, and started doing more reading and talking along these lines, it became clear that that was my commitment, ideologically.

Carolyn Jerome: I joined the Vancouver Black Action Group in about 1970. This group that I had joined was an all Black group, and it sort of grounded me in a way, and, um, confirmed my loyalty to Black people and to myself as a Black woman. And it was really inspiring to be around Black people without any white interference about our ... in a way that we could talk about our lives that was real. And I have found over the years that there's a constant pull to take you somewhere else on other peoples' struggles and to ignore our own. So I really felt empowered, and I felt, really, a renewed loyalty about my history and my Blackness.

Carol Allain: I remember, you know, looking around me and seeing the position that Black people occupied in this country. And to take it further, seeing the position that Black women had in the society. And I remember at that time feeling angry, but not knowing what that feeling was. And when I *met* women from the collective, I mean, they named that feeling for me, and also gave me an outlet where I could, you know, use that energy to work to change things. I mean, people always say that your anger immobilizes you, but that's, you know, that's not true.

Sherona Hall: It's amazing how certain things could affect the way you *think* about society, and it's sometimes not *major* things. 'Cause where I live, right, you have to walk down a track to come to the main road. You don't get anywhere in Kingston unless you pass that particular road. What I would watch for, a lot, was the prison lorry, right? I used to remember watching for that prison lorry, that would pass in the mornings to take the prisoners who were sentenced to hard labour to the quarry, right. I remember standing there and watching that prison lorry that pass, and running down to watch them pass back in the evening and look at the prisoners in the back of the lorry. And what struck me—I mean one day it's just [strikes forehead], it's just like something hit you. But it's *all* poor Black people in that lorry. I mean the blackest of blackest in the country. You know what I mean? You didn't see one fair-skinned person sitting in that lorry, going back in the morning, coming back in the evening. I mean, it's as if people of a certain shade didn't commit crimes, at all. And I remember that thing hitting me, right? And at eighteen looking around and knowing that a lot of the people I went to school with they were killed. And what were they killed for? Nothing. Because they were standing on a street corner and a police jeep come up, and they run, and they happened to take a shot in the back. I mean that kind of stuff, eh?

During the Black Power era, of course, I became also influenced by going to sit and listen to people like Hugh Small, talking about Marxism and stuff, and the Black Power thing in the States. And reading Malcolm X, and *Soul on Ice*, and Eldridge Cleaver, and all those kind of stuff. And I mean, reading *The Wretched of the Earth* when I didn't understand nothing that it was talking about, and I had to read it again years later, and that kind of stuff.

Akua Benjamin: Here were Black people, I think for the first time, that I was meeting Jamaicans, and, you know, Trinidadians were there, and Dominicans, and *all* people from the Caribbean as well as from Africa. Coming together, talking about their own experiences in Canada. But also seeing that it had a link with what was going on in Africa because those were Black people too. People who were trying to throw off the yoke of colonialism. And those are our brothers and those are our sisters, and we felt very close to them.

[Still photo of a march. The cover of a booklet, "One People/ One Aim/ One Destiny// African peoples of the World [top] unite or perish [bottom]."]

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Carolann Wright: I think that I have this philosophy within me that no matter where you come from, no matter who you are, you have the *right* in this country, in this society, to represent yourselves and others like you, in terms of equality. And in that equality, ensuring that equality, and maintaining that.

[Newspaper article with a picture of Carolann Wright: "Regent Park mother running for mayor."]

Carolann Wright (cont.): So it's a very personal thing in terms of just ensuring—not only for my kids or myself—some kind of equality in this society, but for individuals who feel, really, feel the impact of the oppression that happens to poor people in this society.

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Rosemary Brown: But sexism was another issue. I mean that really was a hurdle in terms of getting into politics. Because certainly, whether it was at all-candidates meeting, or phone-in programmes, or whatever, people always raised the issue about whether politics was a place for a woman, or whether politics was a place for a mother. "You have children—why are you not at home taking care of them?"

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Akua Benjamin: Ann Cools, who used to be very active in the community at one point, came to meetings and she started to be very abusive to the men that were there because they were grandstanding. The *men* were in the forefront, you know, and, you know, a lot of the women, what we did, was to *cook* and do all the kinds of shitty jobs, while the *podium* would be reflective of just *males*. And Ann Coos was the one who spoke out against this—not in the best ways, mind you, but it really riveted our attention, really, and to say, "This is sexism." You know, it's fine to talk about ourselves as women, which we never did—we just talked about Black people and da-da, da-da, da-da. But we never really talked about *ourselves*, our *lives*, you know, what sexism and racism does to us. We did not focus on that at all.

* * *

Rosemary Brown: I recognize that the relationship or the connection between myself as a Black person having to deal with racism and myself as a woman having to deal with sexism, largely, really, through following the statements of Black men involved in the Civil Rights movement. Stokely Carmichael—people like that who made comments about Black women's role as being simply there to serve really jolted me, because I knew we had an important place to play in the struggle for equality as Black people. And then to realize that even after that's won, I would still have to deal with an unequal status even within the Black community as a woman was a jolt for me.

* * *

Angela Robertson: You see many other Black organizations where women are involved, is that you see women *doing* the cooking, you know, as Leleti [Tamu] was saying, we do the cooking, we *do*, sort of, the prep work for the demonstration, and yet when it comes time to speak, you know … to speaking, we never get the chance to voice our opinions. So we never get heard and we never get validated as women *in* the movement. You know, so we get validated as women who are *helping* the movement, and the *movement* is male.

Dionne Falconer: Oftentimes, whether it be within the Black movement or in the women's movement, I mean, you know, the issues that are specifically affecting Black women are left out. You know, it's like, sort of: "Oh, they're all women anyways"; or, "They're Black, and so therefore, you know, that'll be good enough." Right? The specificity of issues relating to Black women are not addressed, and so I think that's another part of what the collective is all about: addressing those specific issues that are affecting Black women's lives.

Carol Allain: Also, Black women are tired of having to take, you know, the back space in the Black organizations. I mean, we have to realize that nobody is going to make space for us, that you have to get up and take your space.

Sherona Hall: When I look, even as a younger person, the way I used to organize in my own country, you know what I mean. As I said, I ended up being around a lot of *men*, and I learned to be a feminist from being so much with them and observing the way they deal with women in the political struggle, and dealing with women even on a personal level. It was automatic that I would develop certain feelings about the way I was never going to be treated. When you have worked with four generations of men, politically—*four* generations of men I have worked for, *with* politically, very closely—four generations of men, you can't other than be a feminist. It is unlikely that you would become anything else.

Akua Benjamin: Feminism is a white ideology. And more and more I'm being convinced of that, you know. I see, I see, where I am in my work place, that there is a thrust for women writings, you know, to have discourse about women, that policies and programmes reflect women's realities. The women, again—that thrust is towards mainstream women, *white* women for the most part. And there has not been an equal weight in feminist discourse, you know, in terms of being *inclusive* of *all* those other women that make up this community of women. And so it is very much white; it is very much middle-class, at this point, because I don't think it really even addresses white, poor white women's issues on a consistent, long-term basis.

Rosemary Brown: Coming to feminism was something, I think, that gave me a different analysis of life, that helped me to understand that the things that were happening to me weren't just happening to me. And I can remember the first time I read *The Feminist Mystique*, how I was just blown away by it. Because here I was, all along, seeing other people happily married, raising children, juggling jobs, being chatelaines and socialites and doing all of it without gaining weight or growing old or doing any of these things that were happening to me. And I wondered, what was wrong with me? Why was I having so much difficulty trying to be this super woman? And then, to read about the fact that it happens to everybody. We had been socialized, even before birth—I mean this is generations of socialization—to run this race which we could never win under any circumstances. And that women, not just here, but everywhere, in their own cultures, were confronting the same things: this incredible no-win situation.

Carolann Wright: For me feminism needs a lot more clarity in terms of its relation to Black women and women of colour, to the notion of poverty, and those kinds of things. Not enough clarity for *me* to politically identify myself as a feminist. *Feminist* means, you know, a commonsensical approach to being a *woman* and that whole pride around that; that whole non-acquiescing mentality to believe in who I am, to take on things that, you know, take on anything I want to do. That whole belief. And for me, just to make a long story short, that's what *womanist*—*being* a womanist—is all about. And advocating on behalf of women.

Angela Robertson: People who you interact with who have problems with the term feminism—because they see it solely as a white, middle-class term, a white middle-class label—and they see you fighting against Black *men*. So they don't understand that women, you know, Black women—we have the commonality with Black men of being *Black*, living in a racist society that discriminates on you on the basis of, you know, because you are Black. But also we have to fight *with*

Black men on sexism. And as Linda [Carty] was saying about organizing yourselves as women and labelling yourselves feminists: you put us in the position of being isolated and being labelled as lesbian. And usually *lesbianism* is seen as something derogatory, because when once you're labelled as lesbian you therefore have no political validity.

Leleti Tamu: Even when people thought that *lesbian* and *feminist* were synonymous—you know, to be a feminist you had to be a lesbian—I figured, "Well, I happen to *be* a lesbian. So what am I going to do? Deny that part of myself so I can work in the Black community?"

[Film footage of a march with women chanting, "Women united will never be defeated!" BWC women carrying the Black Women's Collective banner.]

* * *

June Veecock: I think racism, for me, takes precedence over the struggle against sexism. And this is *personal.* I know many of my sisters wouldn't agree with my position. When I look at my family—my sons, my sons-in-law—they've had experience with race. My son lives in Windsor, and, as you know, Windsor is quite a white town. The man in my life, my grandchildren. Even my grandson at three, had a little girl say to him, "I don't play with Black boys." He's three years old. So that's where I'm coming from: because it transcends gender and it has to take precedence if I look at it in the broader ... not only what I experience, but also what my family [experiences], and I don't think my family is any different from any other Black families in Canada.

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Rosemary Brown: I can't separate them. Having been both Black and female, I can't, you know, I can't separate racism and sexism and say one is more important or has had more impact on my life than the other. I believe that people in terms of discriminating against you, are happy when you have both, because they can say, "I'm sorry. I really like your people, but this is not a place where women can work"; or they can say, "I'm sorry. We can't give you housing, or whatever, for one reason other than the other." And usually sexism they find is an easier excuse to handle than racism. People are more uncomfortable with racism than they are with sexism. But there isn't any question that being Black and female you get both of them: you get the benefits, and you certainly get the liabilities of both of them.

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Grace Channer: The Black community experience serious oppression. But if we don't recognize the full extent of what that oppression is, which isn't *just* the colour of our skin—it *is* our sexuality, it *is* our gender, it's all of these things—we're never gonna really have a cohesive form that's gonna really eradicate all the things that we're all here working to eradicate.

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[Footage of a march. Banners read "Fight the attacks, No turning back!" and "We're the first nations."]

Carolyn Jerome: I have always felt that I didn't have a voice in the women's community. And going into the Third World Women's group was not only being able to talk to women who had similar experiences than me, but also women who had very different experiences than me. But I think the fact was that we had never individually had the, the collective ... ever spoken from a collective voice to an issue. So for me it was very strengthening to know that, if I spoke about something I knew that it wasn't just from my own isolated experience.

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Carol Allain: One difficult thing about working within the women's movement, which we have to do, is that dealing with racism is—it's either you always have to educate them on the racism, or tell them that they have to recognize the racism, which is something that they *never* want to do.

Grace Channer: When we were working with the International Women's Day, we were *"invited"* to work. It wasn't as if we as Black women, as a group they thought to invite, was part of the whole movement. We were something *outside* of the movement. So working inside it meant we had to say, "Look, you can't do this. We are women. Women that are connected to women all over the world. And in order to have a real women's' movement you have to work all together, as women organizing together. You can't keep that structure where you invite us, *you* control what goes and we just fill in the gaps."

Angela Robertson: That is why I can understand when a lot of Black women say: "Movement? What movement? I am not involved, and I don't want to be involved because I always get to do the shit work. I am always the one running around, I am always the one *doing* the work, trying to bring women of colour into the organization."

Dionne Falconer: We, as Black feminists, are committed to a feminist change. You realize that it's also important to bring together different groups and to unite because that is a way of making the movement stronger. But also, that doesn't negate the fact that there are certain issues within the movement that has to be addressed, such as, you know, the racism within the movement... and the elitism, also. So those *have* to be addressed, but it's also a recognition that, you know, it's by coming together that you can move forward.

[Footage of a march with women chanting "Hey-hey, ho-ho, racist thought has got to go, Hey-hey, ho-ho, sexist thought has got to go!"]

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Sherona Hall: There is definitely a price to pay when someone makes up their mind to advocate for change, and for the betterment of Black people, and people in general. And if you take that struggle seriously, there is one thing that you must understand: that those career and academic goals, and economic goals, are *unachievable* within the context of the system.

[Moving film footage of a march with banners that read "South[east] Women [word unclear] Toronto," "Korean Women's Collective," and "Black Women's Collective."]

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Akua Benjamin: I get tired, you know, like everybody else. I feel at times that I am burnt out. But our community, you know: what do you do even if you're burnt out and you hear, you know, that police harassment is on the increase? How can you sit back and you do nothing when you hear so many Black kids are in dead-end positions?

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[Footage of Sophia Cook taking part in a march. The caption reads "Sophia Cook—shot by Toronto police, 1989."]

Leleti Tamu: We take strong stand because we *have* nothing to lose, and we've *made* that choice. So now it's not a matter of going in there and kissing anybody's ass because we realize that if … if we don't say it, we are silenced—and silence in this case *does* mean death.

[Footage of a march with women chanting "Hey-hey, ho-ho, racist cops have got to go!" One banner reads, "Coalition Against Racism and Police Violence."]

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Carolyn Jerome: I'm the end result of freedom. I mean every generation of Black people in this country is another result of freedom.

Dionne Falconer: Here I am, you know: I'm a Black feminist; I'm a Black woman and I've made a *conscious* political decision to fight against, you know, these certain things that are impacting upon *my* life, and upon other Black woman's life. Be that racism, sexism, homophobia, you know, elitism, ageism, the whole thing. So, you know, you're identifying—you're taking on this certain kind of identification. And you're also saying that, you know, "I'm fighting for these things, because I want things to change." And that's a very powerful thing to do.

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Credits:

Directed by Dionne Brand, Ginny Stikeman
Cinematography – Joan Hutton (CSC), Moira Simpson, Zoe Dirse, and Susan Trow
Sound recording – Diane Carrière
Editor – Margaret Wong
Assistant Directors – Glace Lawrence, Nicole Thompson
Additional sound – Esther Auger
Art work – Grace Canner
Camera Assistants – Audry Smith, Sharon McGowan, Robin Bain, and Carolyn Wong
Production stills – Carolyn Wong, Nicole Thompson
Assistant sound – Dale Tayler
Visual research – Glace Lawrence, Dionne Falconer, Lynn Calliste, Andrea Worrell,
    Molly Shinhat, and Geeta Sondhi
Original music composed and arranged by Faith Nolan
Music performed by Faith Nolan (guitar), Sherry Shute (guitar), Leleti Tamu (vocals),
    Rachel Melas (bass), Evelyn Datl (keyboards), and Conny Nowe (percussion)

"Sisters in the Struggle" composed and written by Leleti Tamu / NESIS
Photos – Christopher Morris
    Gordon Beck (*Montréal Gazette*)
    Contrast
    Canadian Women's Movement Archives
The Toronto Star – F. Lennon, P. Power, J. Russell, and M. Stuparyk
The Globe and Mail – E. Christensen, F. Dobson, T. Kolley, F. Lum, and E. Reagan

Thanks to:

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Black Women's Collective (Toronto) – Carol Allain, Carol Camper, Linda Carty, Grace Channer, Dionne Falconer, Angela Robertson, Leleti Tamu

Punam Khosla, Sylvia Hamilton, Sophia Cook, and Lynn Calliste

Women's Press, Share Newspaper, Contrast, Canadian Women's Movement Archives, Coalition Against Systematic Oppression, Toronto Transit Commission

Music Recording – Karen Kane (Open Door Recording)
Music Editing – Diane Le Floc'h
Sound Editing – Danuta Klis
Re-recording – Adrain Croll
Titles – Val Teodori
Studio Secretary – Georgette Maurel
Studio Clerk – Linda Paris Quillinan
Unit Administrator – Gisele Guilbault.
Producer – Ginny Stikeman
Executive Producers – Rina Fraticelli, Ginny Stikeman

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"Sisters in the Struggle"

Mmmm, it's international, it's global.
We won't forget 'cause we're sisters in the struggle, yeah-yeah-yeah,
Wo-oh, wo-oh, sisters in the struggle, yeah-yeah-yeah.

They're struggling in the food line, they're struggling in the job line,
They're struggling in the welfare line, they're struggling in the abortion line.
Sisters in the struggle, yeah, sisters in the struggle is what we are.

Mmmm, it's international, it's global.
We won't forget 'cause we're sisters in the struggle, yeah-yeah-yeah,
Wo-oh, wo-oh, sisters in the struggle, yeah-yeah-yeah.

It's international, it's global. Sisters in the struggle is what we are.
Wo-oh, wo-oh, sisters in the struggle; wo-oh, wo-oh, sisters in the struggle,
Wo-oh, wo-oh, sisters in the struggle, yeah-yeah.
Wo-oh, wo-oh, sisters in the struggle; wo-oh, wo-oh, sisters in the struggle.

Long Time Comin'

Director, Dionne Brand
National Film Board of Canada, Studio D
Women at the Well Series
52:27 minutes
1993

[Titles: The National Film Board of Canada, Studio D, Presents *Long Time Comin'*, with Faith Nolan and Grace Channer.]

[Applause. Club announcer: "So let's hear it for the All-Women's Blues Band." More applause.]

Nolan: This is a great evening for me, I'm having a great time. This is probably a highlight of my life—I mean it, I mean it. You know, 'cause this is really important to me. It's more important to me than most of the things I do.

I'd like to thank all the women who've been working on Camp Sis—who, you know, making this project a possibility: that we will have a political education centre for women and children.

And, um, you know, one of the things that we're doing here—you've probably noticed the camera on me. Well, Hollywood's come. At last. And it's nice to have all you little people out here. You know, with that natural, rootsy touch. So glad you could all make it. I'm especially glad that we have some coloured people in the audience: because, you know, it adds that multicultural touch that I'm getting a special grant for. (*laughter, applause*) And especially I'd like to thank the three men that came, because even though I'm a lesbian and I don't have much *use* for you, I still support your money coming to our events. (*laughter, applause*)

I'd like to start this set with a song I'd like to dedicate to all of the sisters that really make my life wonderful. And most of them are here, too, 'cause I see so many: Makeda – Queen of the Lesbians is here, and she's certainly done a lot in our community.

I mean *a lot*. (Building laughter, applause) And we have, you know, Eun Sook Lee has given us community radio. She's doing a great job. You know Grace Channer: she's like my bosom-buddy, you know, she's my sis', she's like blood. She's just great. She's wonderful. I love her. I mean it's not sexual, you know; but I mean I love her in every other way. I dedicate this song to Grace.

["Guide My Feet" traditional gospel]

Sister hold my hand, while I walk this race,
Sister hold my hand, while I walk this race,
Sister hold my hand, while I walk this race,
'Cause I don't want to walk this race alone.

Guide my feet, while I'm walking this race,
Guide my feet, while I walk this race,
Guide my feet, while I walk this race,
'Cause I don't want to walk this race alone.

Sister walk with me, while I walk this race,
Sister walk with me, while I walk this race,
Sister walk with me, while I walk this race,
'Cause I don't want to walk this race alone.

You know that I don't want to walk,
I really don't want to walk,
I really don't want to walk,
This race alone.

(Applause.) Thank you.

[Moving film footage of volunteers building a Camp Sis building.]

[Scanning shot of Grace Channer's studio.]

Channer: The importance of the artist in the Black community is to give voice *for* the Black community, right? 'Cause there's *no* where we have voice, so everything we are and everything we do, whatever field we get into, it really is an expression of our community.

[Moving film footage of Channer working on a carving "But Some of Us are Brave"; a close-up of her hands.]

Channer: I'm in a process of revolution and a process of liberation *as* a woman, and so this voice, this story hasn't been told in what we are taught about the history of art.

There was a lot of pressure to… if you finish high school, then you *should* try and at least go to university. So, I went there, and I found a lot of very racist, homophobic white men who paraded around, and had nothing to teach me except their own narrow world. And it's not what I wanted. If I was going to go to an institution, I wanted to learn about the world, Africa, Asia, art that's coming from those places, and there were no teachers that represented that. Nobody even had a vision that maybe that was important.

[Channer showing parts of a wooden sculpture—"Batari"—to a group of children]

Channer: "I made it out of paper."

Child's voice: "How did you get to make the body?"

Channer: "The body? Well, I weaved [sic]. I went into the woods and I got all kinds of sticks and then I started to weave them together. It's like sewing, sewing the whole body. The trees that she's made with are, like, sixty years old, seventy years old. So she's been around. Definitely, her head floats."

Child's voice: "How did you make that?"

Channer: "I didn't make the head. The ocean and trees and light and all *those* things made the head. She just landed on the beach one day and I saw her there."

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Nolan: I have to have something to sing that I believe in. And for many years I sang songs that didn't mean anything to me, and I found myself very empty, very alone, and very unconnected. And so I wanted to sing what was connected and what was true, and the only music that *has* that is the *people's* music. Music that comes from people. And that music generally allies itself to change and change for the better. And they may call that social change music but it's really just *real* music, about *real* things that are important. The other stuff is just bullshit music to keep people's minds empty.

[Moving film footage: Group setting up the stage and rehearsing "Long Time Comin.'"]

It's been a long time comin'
A long time here
No jobs, no schools
Ain't no hope for the future here
It's been a long time comin'…

[Moving footage: Scene shifts from rehearsal to GC on stage with the band. A full house.]

I'd like to introduce Sherry Shute on the guitar. I'd like to introduce Chiyoko [Szlavnics], who was playing sax earlier. Rachel Melas extraordinaire, sister from the planet Venus. Yes. She cannot be pigeonholed. The wonderful Kat[hleen] Dyson. Yes. And the wonderful Brazilian, get-down-sister Assar Santana.

Been a long time comin'
A long time here
No jobs, no schools, ain't no hope for the future here,
Been a long time comin'
A long time here

Been a long time comin'
A long time here

From teachers to preachers
To the policeman's gun
They don't think we're equal
They keep on and on
Been a long time comin'
A long time here.

It's been a long time comin'

A long time here,
……………………………
Black children charged in Nova Scotia
White children set free
By the colour of our skin
We never get equality.
Been a long time comin'
A long time here.

Pushed out of town to the brushland,
Mulgrave is yuppified
Just like a burnin' Shelbourne town
They're relocated all the time
Long time comin'
A long time here

Nolan: Blues music [is] expressed to talk about juke joints, which are booze cans, which places you can buy liquor illegally. And that was never talked about in *other* music. Other music was just about love that you could share in the air with somebody you didn't even *know*, but you were gonna meet. But the blues spoke *directly* to how we lived as Black people, you know, like the rich man's blues, or the washerwoman's blues. I knew a lot of women that, you know, washed houses to live. And that just seemed to me, that it was finally something I could *believe* in, something I could hear. And I listened to it like the Bible.

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Channer: I grew up in a very racist society and I knew it. From day one you're told you're not worthy. I'm a Black woman who has a culture that's constantly being repressed and oppressed. In having a spirit to question that, you know you have to find somewhere else to go; you have to find an alternative way of finding yourself.

[Footage of black and white of Grace Channer paintings ("But Some of Us Are Brave").]

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Nolan: I grew up around Regent Park, so I grew up knowing all these kids. And I grew up seeing that, you know, it was generational, that their grandmothers maybe lived with them and they were poor, and their mothers lived with them and *they* were poor, and they were going to grow up poor. Some didn't, you know, but most did because you *do* what you're around. You know, your father's a doctor; you'll probably grow up to be a doctor, or a lawyer. So whatever is in your family. And unless you're exposed to other things and ideas then you will, you know, blame yourself. 'Cause we're always taught to blame the victim. And then we blame ourselves for what we haven't got. And I think I realized that I had some opportunities in life.

[Footage of black and white paintings by Channer. First one and then two black women dance to Nolan's "Regina."]

Regina, why did you kill that man?

Four-hundred years of slavery, surely leaves its toll,
Welfare mother trying to make it on your own,
Your kids are hungry, you try to pay the rent,
And where do you go when the money's all spent?
Regina, why did you kill that man?

Well you're standing on a corner trying to make ends meet,
Finally a car stops, another freaky creep,
He starts to pull your hair, slaps you in the face,
You yell for mercy before you knife him in the face.
Regina, why did you kill that man?

[Footage of Channer's "But Some of us Are Brave." Text reads, "Women, half the world, one third the labour force do two-thirds the work." Shadows of the two dancers appear over Channer's work.]

The policeman took your statement, he said, "There's no defense
For killing a white man, and it don't make no sense."

[Footage of Channer's "But Some of us Are Brave." Text reads, "Have one-tenth world income and less than one one-hundredth world property."]

You're sitting in a jail cell, trying to save your life,
You're a Black woman and you'll never be white.
Regina, why did you kill that man?

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Nolan: I could have been in prison, and I probably wo9uld have been if I had been caught. You know, when I was younger I was, like, being the middleman—or middlewoman—you know, for drug deals. I was very young; I didn't really understand. I was told that drugs would make me better, would make me smarter. That was my understanding of taking acid. So, for a lot of that, and growing up in a booze can—I think I realized that the police *were* knocking at the door, and they used to come and bust up the house. You know, it was like any minute you *could* go to jail. And I think it's a very … even *now* as a social activist, any time you're on a picket line or you're on a demonstration line, the police will come and put you in jail.

[Song "Regina" resumes. Moving film footage of women dancing in a studio, then overlying Channer's "But Some of us Are Brave." A portion of the text in the painting reads: "There will never be enough money when you follow what is right."]

Four-hundred years of slavery, surely leaves a toll,
Welfare mother trying to make it on your own,
Your kids are goin' hungry, you try to pay the rent,
But where do you go when the money's all spent?
Regina, why did you kill that man?
Regina, why did you kill that man?
Regina, why did you kill that man?
Tell me why you killed that man.

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Channer: 'Cause men have for too long taken over our bodies, our minds, everything to do with us—and are giving it *back* to us in a way that's totally alien to anything that is who we are as women. So I felt it's our time to start to rewrite, recreate ourselves.

[Footage of the "Batari" sculpture; the focus is on the natural wood head shown previously.]

Channer: Women, female, strong, and in control of ourselves. Being naked with myself—physically, mentally, emotionally, all kinds of ways—is really important in trying to discover oneself.

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Nolan: [Voiceover while camera shows black and white pictures of Billie Holiday.] Well, as a musician—a Black female musician—I think it's always been a struggle to overcome sexism. When I first started, I used to play with Black male musicians a lot. And I found that trying to overcome that kind of sexism where, "You're a women, put your instrument down and just sing and shake it up." Which was very much that whole history of Black women throwing away their instruments. Whether, you know … like Nina Simone… is she always playing her piano? Or Aretha Franklin was a fantastic piano player. Or Gertrude Ma Rainey… did they play piano… you know? So there's always that kind of … that women *shouldn't* play particular instruments.

[Nolan playing guitar. Camera close-ups on "Vibrations," a huge Channer mural with painted figures of brown women dancing.]

Channer: In "Vibrations," the figures, you'll notice, are all females and they're all naked, and they're all sort of rolling and tumbling with fingers and toes. And I'm challenging the whole perception of women in art to be sexual objects. I was coming to terms with my sexuality—a black artist, a Black woman, a Black lesbian—and realizing I didn't need many of the chains that I still had of a patriarchal environment and society that just told me all the things I *should* be.

[Continues to talk, in studio.]

It seemed like my aunt—Oh, I shouldn't … [sotto voce] I shouldn't come out for her should I. (*laughs*) My aunt is a lesbian. But I remember when I was about—I think I was ten or eleven—she had to stay with us 'cause she ran away from a very abusive situation with a man. So my mother would tell us all kinds of homophobic *crap* about her, "And she smells and don't touch her," and all this kind of thing. But I just saw this really sweet, gentle, shy woman who was stranded and not knowing where to go. And I just, you know, I felt so close to her. And she'd stay *there* and I'd sleep here and I'd watch her all night. My mother would say, "I'd hate it if one of mine ever became one of them!" And I used to watch my aunt and think, "I wonder what my mother would say if I said I was one of them?" [*laughs*]

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Leleti Tamu: (reading her poem "Casselberry Harvest.")

We embraced and your arms slipped slowly around me
like the limbs and branches of the
Casselberry tree
that grows from the dark moist earth of ashanti soil

your locks brown and delicious
carry the fragrance from the
blossoms of that tree

in the language of our
foremothers Casselberry must
mean sunkissed days blanketing
a soft orchard with the
indigo sweetness of you

I anticipate the familiar
flavour of your Casselberry harvest.

We embraced and your arms slipped slowly around me
Like the limbs and branches of the
Casselberry tree

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Nolan: Well then there's fourteen, when, the very first time I went to a lesbian bar. And I, you know, I'd been soul sister number one, so I had like this red wig, like, big, red afro wig which was, you know… and false eyelashes, and this tight dress. 'Cause that's how we dressed on the weekends to look good. And I wanted to look *good*. So, I figure I'm still…. Like during the week I wear jeans and a T-shirt, so I'm still like a, you know, a strong girl. But I go to this club and I'm all dressed like this, you know, in this tight dress. I had a Billie Holiday kind of dress; you know, that slit down the side, and the high, you know, those high square heels… square-toed shoes with the heels. So I walk into this club and I'm at the door, and I take out a cigarette like I'm going to light it, right? And about *five* women come *swamping* me to light this cigarette, right! And I'm like, "What's going on here?" Right? And I walk inside the club and I look and see there's all these women, some of them big as houses sitting there, you know, dressed with a tie on, you know, and a suit. And beside them is a *pretty-pretty* girl, you know, in their *pretty, little* dress. And I realize I look like the girl in the pretty dress, but I *like* the girl in the pretty dress. So I go to the girls in the pretty dress and, "Would you like to dance?" And she says, "Uh, uh."

Well if I've been too low, like I've been feeling today…. (Sings "Crazy Woman Blues.")

Gonna pack up all my troubles, I'm wanna move away,
'Cause I'm crazy about your loving
And I want it every day
'Cause I'll never be happy
what more could I say

I got friends and would-be lovers
and I still ain't satisfied
I got a friend and a would-be lover
and I still ain't satisfied
If I can't have your lovin'
you know I'll lay me down and die

Say you'll be mine
till the end of time

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Channer: Being a girl meant you couldn't run, you couldn't jump, you couldn't play, you couldn't discover yourself, you couldn't be adventurous. So, I think I became feminist in my thinking from a very, very early age. But that didn't quite, you know, allow me to be able to discover my sexuality, which was even more tabooed in the social environment that *I* grew up in where there was a lot of Christianity—which was really linked to male domination.

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[Footage of outdoor concert prior to (or after) a Take Back the Night march.]

Nolan: It's cold, huh? Everybody: you're supposed to ask me—this is Toronto's favourite questions—"Excuse me. Were do you come from?" Ask me where I come from.

Audience: "Where do you come from?"

Nolan: I'm the sister from another planet! No.

[Sings "Divide and Rule."]

Everybody's asking me what country I came from
I say I come from this world
They say back where you belong
What the hell is the difference
Your world or my world, there's only one

They always want to always
Divide and rule, make us hate,
Divide and rule, we just can't wait,
Divide and rule, it's not too late,
Divide and rule, we can overcome
Divide and rule us, for it's a political tool.

[Footage of Take Back the Night march in progress.]

Let's talk
Well, we talk about South Africa
One listens on but racism is here
We'll have to overcome, we must overcome, everywhere

The man he whistles, and together all our strength

I'm sure women can be united and not divide and rule. Surely we'll win.
Divide and rule, we're bound to begin,
[Audience sings] Divide and rule [Channer] Come on let's sing,
[Audience sings] Divide and rule [Channer] Together we'll win,
Divide and rule us, it is a political tool.

[Footage of Take Back the Night march in progress. Chanting: "No more patriarchy! No more shit!"]

You know that I'm a
Woman
I love women
I think men should love men.
Everybody wants hatred
It's easy for them
I say divide and rule us
It is a political tool.

We must walk as one and never divide and rule,
[Channer] Can't hear nobody talk, [Audience] divide and rule,
[Channer] Deep voice! [Audience] divide and rule.
Divide and rule us, I think they're trying to rule us, oh, it's a political tool.

You know that, three hundred years ago
The Queen steals the land
Kill off our Native people

If they can't rule them
Now we're so divided
But if we stand as one
Surely we can win
And never, never, never
Divide and rule

Divide and rule us, divide and rule us,
Divide and rule us, it is a political tool,
Divide and rule us is a political tool.

[Nolan and audience interact.]

We're going to take back the night,
What you say: take back the night,
What you wanna do: take back the night,
What we gonna do: take back the night,
I said, what we gonna do: take back the night.

[Channer] Oh we're also going to take back the day [Audience] take back the day!
[Channer] Oh we're gonna take back the night [Audience] take back the night!
Oh we're gonna take back the day, and we're gonna take back the night!
Oh we're gonna take back the day, and we're gonna take back the night!

Nolan: [Yells.] All power to justice and equality. Thank you.

Audience: [Cheers and applause.]

Nolan: [At Channer's home, in the kitchen.] Being a singer is not unusual for a Black woman, it's true. Being an out lesbian Black singer is very unusual. I was always getting in trouble, though, being a lesbian, singing, you know, in different places and I decided one day, "Well, I'm not going to have any more trouble 'cause I'm not playing any place where I can't be out as a lesbian."

Channer: Recently I was in an interview with somebody and found that I, myself, had to edit—felt the need that… it wasn't comfortable to just be totally who I was. Because what's acceptable about being an artist is to talk generally in these fluid off-tones. And it's not to be *real* about, well, my whole understanding and being is centred around everything I am: I'm a lesbian, and that is very much a part of why my art is the way it is.

Nolan: I mean often, many, many times when I go to play an event people will say "It's a union gig," "It's a family day thing, okay? "Faith, do you understand that it's a family day thing?" Like, okay, I'm a lesbian: I don't have family? I have family, you know, I have nieces and nephews. I had a mother and a father; I know what *family* is. You know. But I'm the one in the family that's not supposed to exist.

Channer: For me it's very important to be part of the community and its struggle, and its activism: all of these things. But…

Nolan: But you feel about it, too.

Channer: Yeah, and I feel the *pain*, and that pain has to be put some place.

Nolan: They constantly try to "invisible-ize" you and ignore you. So I just keep throwing it up at people. I always introduce myself as a lesbian, and I always ask them if they're a lesbian, you know, within the first five minutes. So there's generally a little friction that goes on. And after a while, you know, maybe it's the first time someone's said they were a lesbian to them, so they kind of get the idea.

But most people in the Black community don't bother me because they know that when it comes down to it we're really going to go for it. Like, I'm not gonna back down. And I'll challenge their own *heterosexuality*. If *I* have to explain myself, they must too.

Channer: And for me I just have to continue to fight. I don't want to ever be in that prison, and I refuse to stay there.

[Footage of Channer on a bicycle, riding through town, with a milk crate full of pieces of wood and branches. Nolan sings "Little Girl Blues."]

Well there you sit
Braids in your hair
The scuffed up sneakers
A hole in your clothes somewhere

Not safe to laugh or cry
Nobody asks you why
Feel like you wanna die
My little girl blue

Oh little girl blue
I'm just like you
Come and fly
My little girl blue

[Footage shifts to original club concert.]

Some say your special
The best of both worlds,
Neither black nor white
Most times you just don't seem real

The mirror tells no lies
Look close and see
Open up your eyes
You're Black, just like me

Oh little girl blue
I'm just like you

Come and fly
My little girl blue

This lonely race
With a lie for a name
Leaves you so displaced
Can't you see we're all the same

Oh little girl blue
Become a woman now
Love your people
Love yourself
That's the way how

Oh little girl blue
I'm just like you,
Come and fly
My little girl blue [Repeat chorus 3 times. Leleti Tamu sings backup vocals.]

[Audience cheers and applauds.]

[Footage of a Black hand writing in a journal. Leleti Tamu's disembodied voice reads as a Black woman dances in a dark pink studio/room.]

Clarissa: [Reading from diary.] Black woman. I met you today at the Bloor and Yonge subway up top on the northeast side next to the cinema precisely at five. I was so excited about our afternoon and time to write together, I got there one-half hour early.

Nolan [Talking in her studio]: We had this really strong Black identity of, you know, James Brown, "I'm Black and I'm proud." And all these images of the Supremes, and Aretha Franklin, and Martin Luther King. And that was all going on. As a young Black woman I was getting a lot of pride. We were wearing boobers and African wraps and doing all this stuff with my Black friends. And then I would go looking to become a lesbian, and there was like a huge cultural difference, and there was nowhere to take that.

[Footage: voice reads as a Black woman dances in a dark pink studio/room, inter-cut with images of a Black hand writing in a journal.]

Clarissa: [Reading from diary.] I was surprised you had on orange. You rarely wear orange. I love orange. I like the way you look.

Carol: [Reading from diary.] Thinking of the uncommon knowledge of knowing you. I've learned so much about myself simply because of the tender and sometimes not-so-tender challenge of you.

Channer: Coming out as a lesbian for me was very easy because there was a community of women who were involved in all kinds of things: politics, in their own fields of studies, and in all kinds of things. And they were very supportive of me coming out as a lesbian. I was able to ask pertinent questions that I'd always needed to ask, but there had been nowhere to ask it. So I was very lucky as a lesbian to come out amongst women in a community that was doing things and working together and asking those questions and challenging.

[Footage: Disembodied voices read as a Black woman dances in a dark pink studio/room, inter-cut with images of a Black hand writing in a journal.]

Carol: [Reading from diary.] ...uncommon knowledge. I'm thinking I'd rather be lying next to Clarissa. I'd love to be making love, talking fashion, gossiping, revelling on red sheets; making love.

Clarissa: [Reading from diary.] Sometimes when I think of you growing up without Black women I ache inside. I wonder what fills that place up inside of you. Was it empty?

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Nolan: You know, white people were aware of what was going on, they were aware of it in a certain sense, but they were not *it*. So I was trying to find somewhere to be a lesbian and yet maintain culture. Which I don't think I was able to do that much. So I tried to fit in. And I think today the difference is that I *don't* have to fit in: because there *is*, there was, Black lesbians, I can have a full Black culture and still be a lesbian, which is really rewarding.

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[Footage: Leleti Tamu's disembodied voice reads as a Black woman dances in a dark ping studio/room, inter-cut with images of a Black hand writing in a journal.]

Clarissa: [Reading from diary.] My place is filled with the love, support, and abuses of Black women of whom I have measured myself against. What would I feel inside if they suddenly never existed? The thought frightens me. It would be incomprehensible to only have yourself to measure Blackness against in a world which claims it doesn't exist.

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Channer: I was always a lesbian but I just never had a place to find that. I had to be quiet about it or, just, you know, stay isolated which is what most of my first twenty-four years of my life was about. I was a pretty isolated person.

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Carol: [Reading from diary.] I feel so much joy at the birthing of my life, I want to shout. I think of any stone that is mouth-watering and purple, any sound that water makes. Paintings will soon spill out of me.

[Footage: A disembodied voice reads as the camera pans, close-up, over faces, hands, breast, vagina, feet, and legs in Channer paintings.]

Channer: A Black show, like the one I'm in—this one sort of gets squished into the sides of the gallery because it's not a main part of the structure of how this kind of space would run. For me, as a lesbian Black artist, I get even more squished.

The organizers didn't realize I was a lesbian, for some reason, so they saw my work only through, sort of, heterosexual eyes. If you really did look at my work, and if you really *did*, you know, sort of, see who and what I am, you would also recognize that the lesbianism in my work is very much a part of what it is.

A painting that sold in some huge gallery, or sold to just one rich person, just seems to be so totally against everything that I'm about. I believe art is for all people to share in and I don't think certain people, because they have money, should be able to buy it. The Eurocentric vision of art is that every one else creates crafts, which goes to a separate organization all-together. And the only artists are really white, middle-class white men. Even for women, I mean, it's difficult for them to get grants.

Nolan: And it's a buddy-buddy system. It's usually one white guy knows another white guy, and they'll say....

And because I said the word Black about music: well, music is no longer Black, it's just everybody's. 'Cause once white people play jazz, it's no longer Black music, and once white people play blues it's no longer jazz music, and if they play African music, it's no longer African: it's world music. You know what I mean? So you cannot claim that you even own any music or have any tradition. The only real art that's ever funded in this country is for *rich white Europeans*. 'Cause it's like, there's special funds for classical music, you know. We have our Royal Ballet, we have our Royal Opera Company, our Royal Symphonies. Which only about four or five people go to. When you look at the whole population, people would rather see Stompin' Tom.

Channer: If you are speaking out on those kinds of issues, you don't get called in to do concerts, you don't get the gigs, you don't get these things. You really have to work much, much harder that any other kind of musician.

Nolan: Well I don't know 'cause I'm kind of an anomaly, right? 'Cause I have the tambourine on my foot, the harmonica in my mouth, and.... I don't think there's anyone else doing that in North America. So it's kind of, well, I'm a little different, so sometimes they'll pull me in on something, like, a folk festival, which is pretty mainstream. Just for something different. And, you know, that it's blues, right? And there aren't many women my age doing blues, right? And I think that as a songwriter that's all different. But in the art world, well, *you're* really different too.

Channer: But I've been pulled in for certain things. Tokenized—is what we're talking about. I'm pulled in like that, too. I get grants every now and then because nobody knows Black women artists, so, the only name in this town is, you know ... few.

Channer: If my painting lasts for a *week*, it's okay. Europeans, and that whole sensibility of art conservation, is that art should last forever and ever. And *nothing* lasts forever and ever. The thing that I really appreciate about rock painting, is that when those paintings were done, the artist was not concerned with whether it would last for thousands of years and some art historian would discover it. It was an expression of the people and the culture of the time, and another artist, of a *later* time, would come along and just paint right over it. And that's *life*: perpetuating and re-expressing itself.

Nolan: [Walking through the woods and playing "The Woody Land Blues" on her harmonica.] Spirituals always.... When, especially, when I found out that spirituals were connected with slavery, and that it was like, you can go up to heaven. But what they were talking about was you could go and runaway from your slave master and be free. And there was always this great hope. So whenever, you know, you're depressed, you should always listen to gospel because it gives you great hope. Because even if, you know, this God doesn't exist, if God just means good, then we can at least go for the good things in life.

Channer: [Talking with Nolan while sitting in the woods.] So many of our sisters, you know, they get so totally destroyed by the city. And there's nowhere, really, for them to just take the time to balance their lives and start to think about how they *can* really change certain things that are going on.

Nolan: A safe place.

Channer: A safe place to be together and sort of talk in ways we need to in order to give each other strength, to keep going on.

[Footage of Channer and Nolan working on the wooden framework of Camp Sis.]

Nolan: Well cities are really concrete. They're sort of.... Everything's a phallic symbol. Everything's grey, which matches the grey suits that the white men wear, you know, which matches the grey minds that are only interested in accumulating the dollars, which matches the kind of grey heart, which has no soul and doesn't care about how other people live, or who has to suffer for their privilege.

A space for women cannot be oppressed by that and where children, you know cannot be oppressed by that hierarchy: who's the boss, and who owns what. And just a place for ourselves, as women, you know, Black lesbian artists to *live*, and to have a way out.

It would be really good to see that it'll always be here, you know; even after we're gone there'll be a place for women and for children. And even you know, it's open to discussion: maybe you want to have some men come—I'm not saying the land is open to everyone, but I'm saying that we're open in terms of our politics, you know, it's a *world* politics, and we're trying to get it on a global view.

Nolan: [Moving film footage of the Nolan concert.] I wrote this song for Lesbian and Gay Pride Day. It's called loving woman loving, "Wommon Loving Wimmin." I think.

Loving, loving wommon
Wommon loving wimmin
Hold my hand
Loving wommon

What I wanna say when you say good show
Will you be with me
I want to be free

Look at the colour of my skin, see my ancestor's chains
The scars of robbery
They even stole my name

Lovin', lovin' wommon
Wommon loving wimmin
Hold my hand
Loving wommon

I want to walk side by side
I want to see eye to eye
In this land of greed
That is not mine

Ah, wommon let us love
In all the ways we can,
We'll build new horizons
Love life all we can

'Cause we're lovin', lovin' wimmin
Wommon lovin' wimmin
Hold my hand
Loving wommon.

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[Shift to Channer's kitchen, where Channer and Nolan sit at the kitchen table. Both speak with a very heavy English accent, particularly Nolan.]

Nolan: Anyway. Let's play one of those lit'l British songs that you taught me before. Right, luv?

Channer: I taught you a British song, then?

Nolan: Yes … you know that one.

Channer: It's from the Caribbean.

Nolan: Right. British Isles isn't it luv?

Channer: No, West Indies.

Nolan: Isn't it called British Isles, now?

Channer: Which, Caribbean?

Nolan: Play that funky thing you do. Funky.

Channer: No that's North American funky.

Nolan: Funky.

Channer: [Plays a tall drum] That's Caribbean.

Nolan: Then you hit your thing over there.

Channer: Hit my thing? Go, Grace, go.

Nolan: I believe it. I feel it in my blood now…

[Channer and Nolan play instruments.]

Channer: Can you sing?

Nolan: [Sings] "Down a way, where the night's a lezzie…."

Channer: Hold it steady, eh?

[Channer and Nolan finish playing.]

Nolan: That's really fulfilling.

Channer: Really! [Giggles.]

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Credits:

Special thanks to:

Faith Nolan, Grace Channer
Jo-Anne Atherley, Alana McKinnon (dancers on "Regina")
Leleti Tamu, poet ("Casselberry Harvest)
Carol Camper, Clarissa Chandler – diarists
Junia Mason (dancer on diary)

Director – Dionne Brand
Editor – Miume Jan
Cinematographer – Zoe Dirse
Sound recordist – Diane Carrière
Head gaffer – Roger Martin
Assistant camera – Caroline Wong
Assistant Director – Glace Lawrence
Production and post-production coordinator – Andrée Lachapelle
Assistant editor – Marjorie Beaucage
Still photographer – Caroline Wong

Concert:
Sound engineer – Karen Kane
Additional sound recording – John Martin
Second camera – Caroline Wong
Additional gaffer – Marc Hénaut
Assistant camera – Lori P. Longstaff
Production assistant – Filomena Carvalho

Music Composed and arranged by Faith Nolan
Faith Nolan in concert with
Sherry Shute (guitar)
Chiyoko [Szlavnics] (sax)
Rachel Melas (bass)
Assar Santana (percussion)
Kathleen Dyson (guitar)
Additional music – Faith Nolan, Assar Santana
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Works from Grace Channer's oeuvre:

"But Some of Us are Brave," "Black Women's Work," "Batari," "Vibrations," "Lezzie Love Lives," "Voices," "Not a Day Without Struggle, Not a Day Without Love," "In Spite of All They Say," and "Respect."

All songs composed, written, arranged or adapted by Faith Nolan. ©Multicultural Women in Concert – M.W.I.C. / Faith Nolan.

"Guide my Feet" (traditional gospel), "Long Time Comin'," "Instrumental" (traditional gospel), "Regina" (*Africville* album), "Crazy Woman Blues," "Divide and Rule" (*Africville* album), "Little Girl Blue," "The Woody Land Blues," and "Wommon Loving Wimmin."

Producer – Nicole Hubert

Executive producer – Ginny Stikeman

Long Time Comin' A Studio D Production, National Film Board, Canada.

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Listening for Something … Adrienne Rich and Dionne Brand in Conversation

Director, Dionne Brand
National Film Board of Canada, Studio D
Talking Women Series
56:02 minutes
1996

October 26, 1993

Dear Adrienne,

… ten years since the U.S. invasion of Grenada and I'm thinking of your essay "What would we create?"

… your work has also helped me to see the lesbian life with honesty, grace and fearless intimacy.

… I am presently working on a film for Studio D, and would love it if you would be one of the subjects.

… it would be a rare pleasure to talk with you.

Yours in sisterhood and struggle,
Dionne

January 28, 1994

Dear Dionne,

I'm stirred, tonight, thinking of the film… It will embody a kind of exchange between poets who are different in generation, race, class…

Adrienne

May 1, 1994

Dear Dionne,

…Chiapas, South Africa… aren't these at least, … a spirit which goes on refusing to be broken?

…I'd like to talk about the use of the word "America" to mean the U.S.—a part taken for the whole…

… Is poetry a bridge… I want poetry to help me live… keep me from despair…

Love and Struggle,

Adrienne

══

June 1994

Dear Adrienne,

... I write for the people, believing in something other than the nation state in order to be sane...

A writer needs earth, soil and not air.

Something in the bone remembered but not quite known…,

In Sisterhood and love,

Dionne

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Rich: I've never been able to latch on to this idea that simply as a *woman* I transcend national boundaries. You know, that Virginia Woolf thing: "As a woman, I have no country. As a woman, I want no country. As a woman, my country is the whole world." And I feel that for me as a *citizen*, a woman *citizen* of the United States of America, that would be a very easy flight from examining the benefits of my citizenship. And as a citizen of this country I've had *many* benefits from my citizenship.

Brand: I feel that in *fact* she might be right. The word nation is no longer useful. That it has been so *corrupted* by the way that the states that we live in are organized, that it is no longer possible to use those to mean anything anymore. And where I see an overarching kind of definition of nation that's projected by the state, everywhere *I* look, I see ways in which *those* national states that we live in are constructed by leaving out. So that even as Black people belong geographically and consciously to, let us say, North America and the Caribbean, you can still see where that notion doesn't function for us really well. And in states like the Caribbean, you can see where the notion doesn't function for women either; it doesn't function for women here, either.

Rich: I guess I've just become very mistrustful of all-embracing, enveloping feminist theories, for example, well, any kind of theories really.

* * *

Brand: [reading from "no language is neutral"]

> No language is neutral. I used to haunt the beach at Guaya, two rivers sentinel the country sand, not backra white but nigger brown sand, one river dead and teeming from waste and alligators, the other rumbling to the ocean in a tumult, the swift undertow blocking the crossing of little girls except in the tied up dress of big women, then, the taste of leaving was already on my tongue and cut deep into my skinny pigeon toed way, language was strict description and teeth edging truth. Here was beauty and here was nowhere. The smell of hurrying passed my nostrils with the smell of sea water and fresh fish wind, there was history which had taught my eyes to look for escape even beneath the almond leaves fat as women, the conch shell tiny as sand, the rock stone old like water.
>
> ....
>
> Leaving this standing, heart and eyes fixed to a skyscraper and a concrete eternity not knowing then only running away from something that breaks the heart open and nowhere to live. [*NLN* 22, 28]

* * *

Brand: Exile is always apart of … a *major part* of Caribbean experience, or maybe it's a *major part* of Black experience in the West. Exile—feeling not in one's self all the time. So these movements, these passages, these travels are always kind of to yourself or away from yourself. But there're always… there's always something missing.

Flight is a funny thing anyway. At seventeen everybody runs. Canada was simply, sort of, a *new* place. And in some ways that whole notion bought into Canada as a … Canada as this big, vast land of wilderness and so on. So it bought into a kind of Canadian myth of wilderness which really is not … which the colonizers of Canada brought with them.

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Brand: [reading from "no language is neutral"]

> Five hundred dollars
> and a passport full of sand and winking water, is how
> I reach here, a girl's face shimmering from a little
> photograph, her hair between hot comb and afro, feet
> posing in high heel shoes, never to pass her eyes on
> the red-green threads of a humming bird's twitching
> back, the blood warm quickened colours of a
> sea bed, not the rain forest tangled in the smoke-wet,
> well there it was. [*NLN* 28]

==

Rich: Lillian Smith calls it the … she was a white anti-racist woman who died in 1953 … in1963, and she talked about it as the "trembling earth" under everything in the South. And I came *out* of that. And growing up in Baltimore I'd certainly been part of that. And to understand what was underneath that "trembling earth," to begin to *have* to locate myself as a white person in the world where this was going on, and of course wanting to be blameless, wanting to be innocent. Wanting to feel that these things were perpetrated by other white people, but that I was already enlightened, righteous, you know.

Brand: But we're all like that. What was that called?

Rich: Virginia 1906.

Brand: Virginia 1906.

Rich: Yeah, yeah, yeah, about the presumption of one's own innocence if one can … if one can criticize. If one can… if one can join a movement and say: "See, I'm trying to *oppose* this situation which is *evil*, but there is none of this in me." I think that that's been a real temptation for white activists, in the United States and elsewhere—to claim a kind of freedom from our own culpability, our own privilege based on the very system that, you know, we're trying to oppose. And it takes years. I mean it took *me* years. Hopefully it doesn't have to take years. But it took me years, and on into the women's movement, to come to some kind of critical pass where I could really not try to exculpate myself.

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Rich: [reading from "An Atlas of the Difficult World," pt. 1]

A dark woman, head bent, listening for something
—a woman's voice, a man's voice or
voice of the freeway, night after night, metal streaming downcoast
past eucalyptus, cypress, agribusiness empires
THE SALAD BOWL OF THE WORLD, gurr of small planes
dusting strawberries, each berry picked by a hand
in close communion, strawberry blood on the wrist,
Malathion in the throat, communion.... [*Atlas* 3]

==

Rich: The democracy that was envisioned was an exclusionary democracy. It was for white males and property people. And we've certainly known of the exclusion of African Americans. I think less vivid and distinct, until perhaps some time in the sixties, was the sense of the original people and what was done to them. I think that that was the *original* "grain" if you want to call it that.

Brand: My relationship to this country is one of, like, *complete* antipathy and *complete* hatred for what it has done—not only outside, but also inside, too. And I know that somewhere or other that's irrational, because that's not about people. Or, you know, even the groups of people who have, over the course of its history, tried to change it into something else. It *is* about the groups of people who have tried and succeeded in controlling it, and controlling the *will* of all those people. At moments like the Grenada invasion. Or at moments like the undermining of the Nicaraguan struggle, or Chile.

Rich: And now with Cuba.

Brand: Or Cuba.

Rich: Yeah.

7

Brand: And at moments inside, too, with disenfranchising of, you know, people… the way which currently the whole thing about immigration is being played out here against Spanish-speaking people. At those moments, I think, "My God, what a hateful place!"

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Rich: [reading from "An Atlas of the Difficult World," pt. 2]

Here is a map of our country:
here is the Sea of Indifference, glazed with salt
This is the haunted river flowing from brow to groin
we dare not taste its water
This is the desert where missiles are planted like corms
This is the breadbasket of foreclosed farms
This is the birthplace of the rockabilly boy
This is the cemetery of the poor
who died for democracy   This is a battlefield
from a nineteenth-century war   the shrine is famous
This is the sea-town of myth and story   when the fishing fleets
went bankrupt   here is where the jobs were   on the pier
processing frozen fish sticks   hourly wages and no shares…. [*Atlas* 6]

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Rich: I think we feel as though something has happened very much faster than we realized it was going to happen. And then, that sort of forces you to look at… you know, what has the Right been doing all of this time?

Brand: Hmm, hmm…

Rich: When the Left has been in a kind of disarray?

Brand: Right.

Rich: And the Right has been, very consciously and with great method, consolidating power, moulding opinion, framing discourse, snatching certain kinds of discourse away from the progressives.

Brand: Yeah.

Rich: Renaming everything is this extraordinary Orwellian way.

══

Brand: I have no concept of what it would be like to live from inside. And to feel a belonging from inside, some kind of belonging, and to . . .

Rich: This is my country…

Brand: Yeah.

Rich: … where all this is going on.

* * *

Rich: [reading from "An Atlas of the Difficult World," pt. 1]

> —this is where I live now. If you had known me
> once, you'd still know me now though in a different
> light and life. This is no place you ever knew me.
> But it would not surprise you

to find me here, walking in the fog, the sweep of the great ocean
eluding me, even the curve of the bay, because as always
I fix on the land.   I am stuck to earth.   What I love here
is old ranches, leaning seaward, lowroofed spreads between rocks
small canyons running through pitched hillsides
liveoaks twisted on steepness, the eucalyptus avenue leading
to the wrecked homestead, the fogwreathed heavy-chested cattle
on their blond hills.   I drive inland over roads
closed in wet weather, past shacks hunched in the canyons
roads that crawl down into darkness and wind into light
where trucks have crashed and riders of horses tangled
to death with lowstruck boughs.   These are not the roads
you knew me by.   But the woman driving, walking, watching
for life and death, is the same. [*Atlas* 4–5]

══

Rich: I've been reading a memoir—by a German Jewish historian, Felix Gilbert—of living in Germany during the Weimar and then the Nazi periods, then he, of course, left.

Brand: Hmm, hmm.

Rich: And some of the correspondence from his family and friends about … you know, after Hitler was elected—and of course he *was* elected.

Brand: Hmm, hmm.

Rich: There are strong parallels. This is not then, and the United States is not Germany, and I keep reminding myself that historical parallels only work up to a certain point. But I see the same kinds of fears among the population that were *fostered* by the Nazis. The need for scapegoats.

Brand: Absolutely.

Rich: The blaming of economic crisis and disaster on people, *groups* of people, who are supposed to be taking bread from the mouths of the *real*, quote, citizens.

Brand: But there must be a mood that allows that to flourish.

Rich: Well, there's more than a mood.

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Rich: [reading from "An Atlas of the Difficult World," pt. 5]

…Appomattox

Wounded Knee, Los Alamos, Selma, the last airlift from Saigon
the ex-Army nurse hitch-hiking from the debriefing center; medal
of spit on the veteran's shoulder
—catch if you can this unbound land these sates without a cause
earth of despoiled graves and grazing these embittered brooks
these pilgrim ants pouring out from the bronze eyes, ears,
nostrils,
the mouth of liberty….. [*Atlas* 12]

Brand: One does have a sense that one lives in an American empire, and that no other kinds of voices will be entertained. And ever since the fall of the Soviet Union, that sense is even stronger, so that not even the voices of, you know, disenfranchised people in what is called the Third World get heard as offering an alternative to how we are all going to live.

Rich: We are really looking at an all-embracing global system, in which, as you say, the capitalism itself has become the nation.... And—and there *is* no other nation to belong to, you know….. But then this makes me think of Derek Walcott's line: "My only nation was the imagination." (Both Rich and Brand laugh)

Brand: Well that's what *we* have, I guess—that's what we have to fall back on, I suppose.

Rich: But in the larger sense, you know, that to *imagine* something different *is* the task.

[Moving film footage of the October, 1983 U.S. invasion of Grenada.]

Brand: [reading from "Diary—The grenada crisis"]

In the pale air overlooking the town
in the anxious dock
where sweat and arms are lost
already,
the ship and the cement
drop against the metal skies,
a yankee paratrooper strangles in his sheet.

prayers for rain,
instead again this wonderful sky;
an evening of the war and those of us looking
with our mouths open

see beauty become appalling,
sunset, breaths of grey clouds streaked red,
we are watching a house burn.

All afternoon and all night,
each night we watch a different
fire burn,
Tuesday, Butler House
Wednesday, Radio Free Grenada
Thursday, The Police Station
A voice at the window looking
"the whole damn town should burn"
another "no too many of us will die".

eyes full of sleep lie awake
we have difficulty eating,
"what's that" to every new sound
of the war. [*CHS* 38]

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Brand: It was probably about '59. I was a kid, but I heard about the Cuban revolution. And the way I heard about the Cuban revolution was, my uncle, who lived in Mayaro, Trinidad, had heard about the Cuban revolution, had heard about Fidel, you know, coming down from the Sierra Maestra, and got into a fishing boat and went to Cuba to see what was going on.

When I began to know what communism meant, that it meant that there was a way out for the masses and masses of people that I knew, who lived under, you know, big bosses, you know, under the hot sun walking with machete from, you know, this place to that place to go work for a big boss, to go cut coconut, to go cut cane too, to go work in the oil field, every day, not working for themselves. Then it fascinated me more and more why he had done that. And he remains a kind of a … my metaphor. You know, to just get into a fishing boat at the south of Trinidad…

Rich: Up and off…

Brand: … and to go up to Cuba to find out what was going on. It meant to me that he had… there was something in him that needed this rescue, you know. And he must have been hearing about all the talk of freedom for working people, and it must have inspired him to go. And so, I just spent the rest of my time, my *life*, in a way, sort of learning more and more about just such an idea. So I became a communist. I became a communist before I even read Marx.

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Brand: [reading from "Diary—The grenada crisis"]

In the five a.m. cold light
something is missing,
some part of the body, some
area of the world, an island,
a place to think about,

I am walking on the rock of
a beach in Barbados
looking to where Grenada was
now, the flight of an american bomber
leaves the mark of a rapist in the room.
....
the last evening,
the dock and the sky make one,
somewhere, it has disappeared,
the hard sky sends
military transports,
the darkness and my shoulders
meet at the neck,
no air comes up,
we have breathed the last of it.

In the Grand Etang
mist and damp
the road to Fedon
fern, sturdy,
hesitate
awaiting guerrillas. [*CHS* 38–39]

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Rich: First there had been the Fascist threat, the Nazi threat. World War II. And then, suddenly, there was the Soviet threat. And Communism came to *mean* that. And an American Communist was a disloyal traitor who basically wanted to sell the

United States to the Soviet Union. That *idea*, that you say was sort of the basic idea for you, I never heard communism described in that way until I was older.

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Rich: [reading from "For Ethel Rosenberg," pt. 1]

Europe 1953:
throughout my random sleepwalk
the words

scratched on walls, on pavements
painted over railway arches
Liberez les Rosenberg!

Escaping from home I found
home everywhere:
the Jewish question, Communism

marriage itself
a question of loyalty
or punishment

my Jewish father writing me
letters of seventeen pages
finely inscribed harangues

questions of loyalty
and punishment
One week before my wedding

that couple gets the chair…. [*Wild* 26]

═══

Rich: So when you asked me why *I* didn't join the communist party—a lot of reasons, you know. The conceptualizing of it around me, which was almost total: a great deal of fear, and a great deal of disillusion on the part of many American communists who had fled the Party after the Khrushchev reports.

Brand: Hmm, hmm…

Rich: And in the face of McCarthyism. And it was almost as though there were these two things happening, and people saw no way to go except out.

Rich: [reading from "For Ethel Rosenberg," pts. 2 and 4]

She sank however into my soul   A weight of sadness.
I hardly can register how deep
her memory has sunk   that wife and mother

like so many
who seemed to get nothing out of any of it
except her children

that daughter   of a family
like so many
needing its female monster

she, actually wishing to be   *an artist*
wanting out of poverty
possibly also really wanting
                                        revolution

that woman   strapped in the chair
no fear and no regrets
charged by posterity

not with selling secrets to the Communists
but with wanting   *to distinguish*
herself   being a bad daughter   a bad mother

And I   walking to my wedding
by the same token a bad daughter   a bad sister
my forces focussed

on that hardly revolutionary effort

....

If I have held her at arm's length till now
if I have still believed it was
my loyalty, my punishment at stake

if I dare imagine her surviving
I must be fair to what she must have lived through.
[a separate death, a life unto itself] [*Wild* 27–28, 30]

Brand: All of the language of feminism and of liberation has now been … is now commonplace among the very people who continue to control these structures that we live in, who continue to control capitalism all over the world. I doubt very much whether capitalists mean to change women's lives, by giving them any sovereignty. Do you know what I mean?

Rich: So you're saying that your pessimistic on those grounds as well as on the grounds that… you know, we were talking last night about the United Nations conference on populations at Cairo and that they came forth with a consensus that the solution to that problem was the empowerment and education of women.[1]

Brand: You see, I've been just hearing this for the last twenty years. About the empowerment and education of women, and… and women in Third World countries need this empowerment and education, etcetera. And I'm not saying that some of that, particularly when it's led by women there, hasn't changed the quality of women's life there or haven't brought up … haven't helped in looking at the notion of women's oppression. But who controls it … alarms me. Because those who control it are not those people who actually want to see the power relations in the world as a whole change, who actually want to see the equal distribution of wealth. They actually want the introduction of those women into a world capitalist economy…

Rich: At a certain level.

Brand: Not the equal distribution of wealth all over the world. They don't have a vision of socialism where one has some control of one's labour, where one's labour is actually worth what it is worth. You see what I mean?

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[1] The United Nations International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) was held in Cairo, Egypt, September 5th through the 13th, 1994. As the name of the conference suggests, the focus fell on macro- and socio-economic policies to promote sustained economic growth in the context of sustainable development in all countries and to mobilize human and financial resources for global problem-solving. The conference was deemed necessary in light of the growing recognition of global population, development and environmental interdependence and acknowledgement that although ample technological resources have been available for some time to ameliorate socio-economic disparities on a global scale, their use for socially equitable and environmentally sound development has been seriously limited.

Rich: For women's liberation, for genuine women's liberation, there can be no coexistence with capitalism. We've also, I think, have seen that socialism *alone* will not automatically deliver this.

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Rich: We now have the Right calling us Femi-Nazis, you know, and claiming that we are threatening to establish some kind of female tyranny. The idea that things could change around *women*, or that women could change the things around us, suggests that a great many other things would have to change. Not just around women. That whole systems of relationship would have to change, whole structures of power would have to change. And that is very, very threatening. And in some ways I think the Right has been, in this country, far more alert to the *power* of feminism than maybe a lot of the feminists themselves.

Brand: And the new arguments about how it disenfranchises *men* to call for your rights. White, middle-class men are now *victimized* by affirmative action and so on.

Rich: By all concept of social justice. (Both laugh)

Brand: That's kind of funny, isn't it?

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Brand: [reading from "no language is neutral"]

Pilate was that river I never crossed as a child. A
woman, my mother, was weeping on its banks,
weeping for the sufferer she would become, she a too
black woman weeping, those little girls trailing her
footsteps reluctantly and without love for this shaking
woman blood and salt in her mouth, weeping, that
river gushed past her feet blocked her flight … and go
where, lady, weeping and go where, turning back to
face herself now only the oblique shape of something
without expectation, her body composed in doubt
then she'd come to bend her back, to dissemble, then
to stand on anger like a ledge, a tilting house, the
crazy curtain blazing at her teeth. A woman who
thought [sic] she was human but got the message, female
and black and somehow those who gave it to her
were like family, mother and brother, spitting woman

> at her, somehow they were the only place to return to
> and this gushing river had already swallowed most of
> her…. [*NLN* 27]

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Rich: So I remember writing this poem sometime in the fifties, I guess, in which the speaker is a man who is looking at the woman he once loved who has married somebody else and has been formed and shaped by this institution into someone he both does and does not recognize. And it's a poem that's extremely *critical* of the institution. But I had to use, I felt at the time, I had to use the voice of a man. It was the gaze of a man that saw this woman. Of course, it was *my* gaze. It was *my* seeing her staggers out against the wine to hang clothes on a clothesline. And all of her intelligence has been thrown into that stance.

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Brand: If I look at the poetry that I wrote when I … when there was the suggestions that I was straight it always had a reluctance in it or a resistance to … to roles in it, or something … or a … I mean, I can only look back now and look at it. I cannot say that *then* I was consciously doing that. I was merely uncomfortable, then, with something that was going on and so… and I wrote it in that uncomfortable fashion.

But then again, I was highly preoccupied in the early … in early writing with, as I continue to be, with African liberation or with Black liberation. So that became, sort of, *the* important thing to write about, and not the personal.

Rich: To an extent, it's true in my work too. That is I was addressing certain political themes, certain themes that were recognized as political, before I was addressing … addressing my own desire. My own desire, which was still seen as a personal issue. But I think that the … I mean I think that the advantage of that is that you can have … you come to that with a sense of the *world* in which it's being lived out. You don't think of it as something that's happening *in* private, *in* a protected space, in a space that can *ever* be protected. You know, you come to it with that awareness. And you're not, you're not trying, then, to write, you know, romantic love poetry, but it's about women.

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Rich: [reading from "Origins and History of Consciousness," pts. 1 and 2]

No one sleeps in this room without
the dream of a common language.

II
It was simple to meet you, simple to take your eyes
into mine, saying: these are eyes I have known
from the first. . . . It was simple to touch you
against the hacked background, the grain of what we
had been, the choices, years. . . . It was even simple
to take each other's lives in our hands, as bodies. [*Dream* 8]

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Rich: We learn that a lesbian erotic… and that we learn it from women, whether or not they are lesbians… that there are gestures, there are stances. There are female erotic movements in the world which, as very young girls, as little children, we observe, we notice e, they sink into us subliminally, and we associate this with a *woman*. Not with a woman and a *man*.

═══

Rich: [reading from "Origins and History of Consciousness," pt. 2]

What is not simple: to wake from drowning
from where the ocean beat inside us like an afterbirth
into this common, acute particularity
these two selves who walked half a lifetime untouching—
to wake to something deceptively simple: a glass
sweated with dew, a ring of the telephone, a scream
of someone beaten up far down in the street
causing each of us to listen to her own inward scream

knowing the mind of the mugger and the mugged
as any woman must who stands to survive this city,
this century, this life. . . . [*Dream* 8]

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Brand: Looking at the language that we use as writers who are women, about women, and whether we recreate the language of that heterosexuality…in some of the work, there is the sense of the body as really a *painful* place all the time, because it is always constructed within the confines of heterosexuality, and how that means really about men controlling women. So that one doesn't experience pleasure for one's *self*. One is a symbol of pleasure for others. And the only ways in which women could exist in many [sic] of that work—and work by men and work by women—was as, you know, as mother—in which there were beautiful, like elaborate descriptions, elaborate sensual descriptions of mother and grandmother, etcetera—but no elaborate and sensual descriptions of woman as sexual for herself.

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Brand: [reading from "hard against the soul," pt. 10]

I saw this woman once in another poem, sitting,
throwing water over her head on the rind of a country
beach as she turned toward her century. Seeing her
no part of me was comfortable with itself. I envied her,
so old and set aside, a certain habit washed from her
eyes. I must have recognized her. I know I watched
her along the rim of the surf promising myself, an old
woman is free. In my nerves something there
unravelling, and she was a place to go, believe me,
against gales of masculinity but in that then, she was
masculine, old woman, old bird squinting at the
water's wing above her head, swearing under her
breath. I had a mind that she would be graceful in me
and she might have been if I had not heard you
laughing in another tense and lifted my head from her
dry charm. [*NLN* 47]

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Brand: I often wonder, for example, when people talk about Langston Hughes's work and Langston Hughes's being gay and how Langston Hughes becomes…but Langston Hughes is a sort of major African American poet. So that part of his work that doesn't speak *explicitly* about his sexuality, which is a great part of his work, how is it infused with his sexuality? Like I…do you know what I mean? And so therefore, what we are *loving*, straight and lesbian and gay, about his work…

Rich: And that's true of so much of all culture that has been made by gay men and by lesbians. Whether they were professing that they were or not…

Brand: Right.

Rich: Or weather there were names for that, even, you know, when they were doing this.

Brand: Yeah.

Rich: And the other side of it is…although there is this heterosexual—heterosex*ist*—programming and language and borders and structure. That that's all still a very permeable membrane.

Brand: [reading from "hard against the soul," pt. 10]

> Old woman, that was the fragment that I caught in
> your eye, that was the look I fell in love with, the piece
> of you that kept, the piece you left, the lesbian,
> the inviolable….
> ....
> There are saints of this ancestry
> too who laugh themselves like jamettes in the
> pleasure of their legs and caress their sex in mirrors.
> I have become myself. A woman who looks
> at a woman and says, here, I have found you,
> in this, I am blackening in my way. [*NLN* 50–51]

Rich: I was hearing women talk about their strong, powerful grandmothers and the role of these grandmothers in the family, and matriarchs, and so on. And I knew that neither of my grandmothers had been a matriarch. And… neither my Jewish grandmother nor my Protestant grandmother. And that they had lived lives which were, you know, relatively privileged, because they were white middle-class women, but that they also had not…partly as Southern women, I would have to say, of their era, their generation, and partly just as who they were, in the context of their families…never, as you say, never been able to plumb their full capacities.

I quote Lillian Smith in the third of those poems. I sort of adopt her as my Southern grandmother, because…but she was of a later generation than they. But she was an anti-racist activist throughout her life. And she was also a terrible anticommunist, I have to say. (Rich laughs) But she was, for her time and class and, you know, where she came from, she broke with that.

Brand: So it's *that* moment in every woman, or something, that… that I really kind of marvel at, that's true. Even as I… even as I understand the casualties, you know. Because I mean, I think my grandmother was a casualty of all that. Which is not to say…

Rich: Was she a powerful figure in her own world, in her own family world, even?

Brand: Yes and no. I don't know. *I've* sort of immortalized her, you know what I mean, but I don't know. Now, more years have passed, and the more the years pass, I wonder if that immortalizing is just in my head.

Rich: Hmm, hmm.

Brand: There must have been some feature of her, I don't know, but…

Rich: That you took.

Brand: Yes.

Rich: That you could take out and go with.

Brand: Yes, yes.

Rich: And *run* with.

Brand: The only piece I didn't feel was going to kill me. Because maybe… I think there were other pieces that I saw that I thought were killing, and that I had to run from like crazy. And that was a lot of things. I think that was domesticity; I think it was heterosexuality. All the pieces that I thought would weaken me that I saw weaken her.

Rich: Hmm, hmm.

Brand: I think I fled from all those pieces.

Rich: Hmm, hmm.

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Rich: [reading from "An Atlas of the Difficult World," pt. 1]

I don't want to hear how he beat her after the earthquake,
tore up her writing, threw the kerosene
lantern into her face waiting
like an unbearable mirror of his own.   I don't
want to hear how she finally ran from the trailer
how he tore the keys from her hands, jumped into the truck
and backed it into her.   I don't want to think
how her guesses betrayed her—that he meant well, that she
was really the stronger and ought not to leave him
to his own apparent devastation.   I don't what to know
wreckage, dreck and waste, but these are the materials
and so are the slow lift of the moon's belly
over wreckage, deck, and waste, wild treefrogs calling in
another season, light and music still pouring over
our fissured, cracked terrain. [*Atlas* 4]

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Rich: I had this rebellious feeling that whatever it meant to be a woman I wanted *that*, and I wanted to be a poet. And somehow I was going to have it all and I was going to do it. And I married quite young…and I had three children before I was thirty. And…

Brand: Hmm, hmm.

Rich: … so that sort of youthful bravura quickly had to look some realities in the face.

Brand: Hmm, hmm.

Rich: But I was very guilty a lot of the time, simply because I didn't feel this was fulfillment for me. And in the fifties, certainly in the white middle-class which *I* inhabited, such feelings were considered a sign of neurosis, if not psychosis.

The only help I had was through poetry, when I cold write poetry. And I would be writing these little scraps when I had the energy or the time, putting them in a drawer, and then gradually beginning to realize that they amounted to more than little scraps. That they were, in fact, a kind of sequence of poems, and that they were all around this theme of what it is to be a woman.

Brand: Right.

Rich: And that was the evolution of the long-poem called "Snapshots of a Daughter-in-law," which I wrote in the early sixties. But I had so much self-doubt as a poet in those years, and I thought I'd stopped being a poet. But I couldn't stop writing poetry.

Brand: How did being Jewish enter that whole, sort of, construction of yourself as well as the work?

Rich: As a child I grew up in a very assimilated world. And there wasn't a great deal being said about that. And this was, of course, during the 1930s and 1940s, when being Jewish was at a very charged point in history, if it ever isn't. And, you know, when I think back on it, actually, that generation that I was, you know, sixteen years old in 1945, the end of the war, the newsreels coming out of the death camps, going downtown in Baltimore to see those newsreels by myself, because in some way I knew my parents wouldn't want me to go.

Brand: Hmm, hmm.

Rich: and…

Brand: And so their response at this time was to…

Rich: Basically to keep quiet about it…

Brand: Keep quiet about it.

Rich: …keep quiet about it. A strategy of "If you… if you don't make trouble…"

Brand: It won't happen.

Rich: "…Trouble won't come looking for you."

Brand: But it does, doesn't it?

Rich: But of course it does, and it's a mistaken strategy.

Brand: Absolutely.

Rich: Those images, you know, from those first newsreels, I think just stayed with me forever as a part of my life.

Brand: [reading from "no language is neutral"]

                    To hate this, they must have been
dragged through the Manzinilla spitting out the last
spun syllables for cruelty, new sound forming,

> pushing toward lips made to bubble blood. This road
> could match that. Hard-bitten on mangrove and wild
> bush, the sea wind heaving any remnants of
> consonant curses into choking aspirate. No
> language is neutral seared in the spine's unravelling.
> Here is history too. A backbone bending and
> unbending without a word, heat, bellowing these
> lungs spongy, exhaled in humming, the ocean, a
> way out and not anything of beauty, tipping turquoise
> and scandalous. [*NLN* 23]

==

Brand: Concretely, what I think I'm doing when I am writing poetry is, I think that I am speaking *to* Black people. And particularly those people that share the same kind of history as I do, because history is a very present and real thing in my life, and also history is not some all-controlling thing either. We're making it every day, so we can change it every day. And I guess that's the other important note, in that making those lines up, to say that we change history every day by the way that we act.

Rich: When you say that you are writing for Black people...

Brand: *To* them.

Rich: *To* them.

Brand: Yeah, yeah.

Rich: How do you feel about being overheard?

Brand: I concentrate on the *one* hearing. So that if anyone else hears it, then I am pleased, sure. Do you know? But I, in terms of crafting that line, I must speak to the hearer: and the hearer I've identified—the task that I identified—is this hearer who must hear it out of the history of colonialism and slavery and continued kind of oppression in the world as we know it today. And whoever overhears, hopefully—because I've overheard other places…I've also been forced to hear.

Rich: That too.

Brand: True. I mean I had my…I've unwillingly been trained to hear other things, too. So I figure, whoever wants to come in can come in…and you know, at times I don't even really care about the interpretation that they make of it. What I *do* care about is the interpretation that the hearer that I'm speaking to hears, what the hearer hears of it, you know, what Black people hear me say. That's really crucial. That's when I know I've made the poem.

Brand: [reading from "no language is neutral"]

How to fly gravity,
how to balance basket and prose reaching for
murder. Silence done curse god and beauty here,
people does hear things in the heliconia peace
a morphology of rolling chain and copper gong
now shape this twang, falsettos of whip and air
rudiment this grammar. Take what I tell you. When
these barracks held slaves between their stone
halters, talking was left for night and hush was idiom
and hot core. [*NLN* 23]

Rich: What incredible distortion of the mind and heart goes on for the people who are living there. The *master*, the *colonists* who are living there along side such enormous suffering, and to be able to do that, what they'd have to do to themselves, and what they'd have to do to their own ways of seeing. And what they'd have to do to their own inner knowledge and their own hearts…and that that's a part of history. It's a part of the history of the oppressor that is very rarely talked about: not only what the oppressor does to those who he can subjugate, but also what he *and* she are doing to themselves.

Brand: Yeah. Toni Morrison talks about… that we often talk about what happened to Black people enslaved and people who were victims of oppression. But she says, it's something like, "What happens to the hand that pours the acid?" You know, "What does that hand look like?"

Rich: And we're… you know, we're still working out of that history.

Brand: Oh, absolutely.

Rich: You know, with both… both parts of it.

Brand: Yeah.

═══

Rich: [reading from "SIX: EDGELIT"]

> This week I've dredged my pages
> for anything usable
>   head, heart, perforated
> by raw disgust and fear
> If I dredge up anything it's suffused
> by what it works in, "like the dyer's hand"
> I name it unsteady, slick, unworthy
>   and I go on
>
> In my sixty-fifth year I know something about language:
> it can eat or be eaten by experience
> Medbh, poetry means refusing
> the choice to kill or die
>
> but this life of continuing is for the sane mad
> and the bravest monsters [*Dark* 70–71]

═══

Rich: It really isn't that one just has this secret, illicit pleasure in making poetry or making, you know, art, and feels guilty about it. But I think if you have that pleasure, if you have that joy of creativity, and you've been allowed to have it in a society like, you know, yours or mine, you *want* it for everyone. You really *want* it for…there as a possibility for anyone who might have that desire.

═══

Brand: [reading from "no language is neutral"]

> In another place, not here, a woman might touch
> something between beauty and nowhere, back there
> and here, might pass hand over hand her own
> trembling life, but I have tried to imagine a sea not
> bleeding, a girl's glance full as a verse, a woman
> growing old and never crying to a radio hissing of a
> black boy's murder. I have tried to keep my throat
> gurgling like a bird's. I have listened to the hard
> gossip of race that inhabits this road. Even in this I
> have tried to hum mud and feathers and sit peacefully
> in this foliage of bones and rain. I have chewed a few

> votive leaves here, their taste already disenchanting my mothers. I have tried to write this thing calmly even as its lines burn to a close. I have come to know something simple. Each sentence realised or dreamed jumps like a pulse with history and takes a side…. [*NLN* 34]

Brand: I've just always had like a real love for the sound of things. That's the simplest way I could tell it.

Credits:

Director – Dionne Brand
Associate director – Miume Jan Eramo
Editor – Miume Jan Eramo
Artistic consultant – Adrienne Rich
Producer – Signe Johansson
Executive producer – Ginny Stikeman
Cinematographers – Susan Trow, Moira Simpson
Second camera – Carolyn Wong
Camera assistant – Carolyn Wong
Sound recordist – Justine Pimlott
Location stills photographer – Carolyn Wong
Additional stills – Min Sook Lee
Production assistant / Location manager – Margaret Hinkson
Production co-ordinator – Andrée Lachpelle
Unit administrator – Gisèle Guilbault
Post production co-ordinator – Grace Avrith
Title design – Gaspard Gaudreau
Original music composed and produced by Faith Nolan

Music pieces: “Jordan’s Jump,” “D’s Jazz,” “Faith Eileen’s Blues,” “Liwanag,” “Zakiya,” “Teresa Willie Blues,” “Filo Nilima”

Musicians: Orin Isaacs (bass), Wilson Laurencin (drums), Michael Massaro (wind instruments), Faith Nolan (guitar), Mark Patterson (guitar), Darren Sheppard (tenor pan), David Williams (piano), Lionel Williams (acoustic bass)

Music recording and mixing studio – North 49th St Sound

Engineer – Tray Bynoe

Sound and music editing – Jacqueline Newell

Foley artist – Lise Wedlock

Foley recording – Nathalie Morin

Re-recording – Jean Vialard

Archival research – Abby Hershler, Melissa Dickie

Archival sources – Archive Film, Roz Payne, Reuters Television Library

Special thanks to:

Makeda Silvera, Stephanie Martin, Leleti Tamu, Dateje, Punam Khosla, Jennifer Kawaja, The people of Trinidad

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Appendix B: A Dionne Brand Chronology

This appendix provides a chronology of some of the fundamental events in Dionne Brand's life, as well as a list of works she has published, positions of social activism and volunteer work, teaching and writer-in-residence positions she has held, and the interviews she has conducted. Portions of the last three sections of this chronology are heavily dependent on material available in Carol Morrell's "Dionne Brand" (*Grammar* 169–70). Attempts to confirm with Dionne Brand the accuracy of particular dates, the names of positions she occupied, and in what organizations, could not be accomplished prior to completion of this dissertation because Brand was in the midst of a new novel. Items of questionable accuracy are marked with an asterisk (*).

Chronology

1953

- Born in Guayguayare, Trinidad.

1970

- Graduated from Naparima Girls' High School.
- Immigrated to Toronto.

1975

- Graduated with a B.A. in English and Philosophy from the University of Toronto.

1978

- *'For Day Morning*. Toronto: Khoisan Artists, 1978.

1979

- *Earth Magic*. Toronto: Kids Can, 1979.

1982

- *Primitive Offensive*. Toronto: Williams-Wallace, 1982.

1983

- Served in Grenada as an Information Officer for the Agency for Rural Transformation, and worked also with the Caribbean People's Development Agencies.
- Co-edited *Fireweed* 16, Women of Colour Issue, with Nila Gupta, Makeda Silvera, Himani Bannerji, and Prabha Khosla.
- Bannerji, Himani, et al. "We Appear Silent to People Who are Deaf to What We Say." Part One. *Fireweed* 16 (Spring 1983) : 8-17.
- Bannerji, Himani, et al. "Organising Exclusion: Race, Class, Community and the White Women's Movement." Part Two. *Fireweed* 17 (Summer/Fall 1983) : 57-65.
- *Winter Epigrams and Epigrams to Ernesto Cardenal in Defense of Claudia*. Toronto: Williams-Wallace, 1983. Includes an introduction by Roger McTair (no page).

1984

- "The Caribbean." Poetry column, in *Poetry Canada Review* 6.1 (Fall 1984) : 24; 6.2 (Winter1984–1985) : 26.
- "'U.S. is Taking Charge': A First-hand Account of the Grenadian Invasion." *This Magazine* 18.1 (April 1984) : 4–9.
- "A Working Paper on Black Women in Toronto: Gender, Race and Class." *Fireweed* 19 (Summer/Fall 1984) : 26–43.
- *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun.* Toronto: Williams-Wallace, 1984.
- "Sans Souci" was first published in *Stories by Canadian Women.* Ed. Rosemary Sullivan. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1984. 379–388.

1985

- "The Caribbean." Poetry column, in *Poetry Canada Review* 6.3 (Spring1985) : 31.
- Co-authored, with Linda Carty, "Defining World Feminism: If this is Global, Where the Hell Are We?" Rev. of Robin Morgan, *Sisterhood is Global: The International Women's Movement Anthology. Fuse Magazine* (Fall 1985) : 42–44.
- Krisantha Sri Bhaggiyadatta, "The Production of Free Speech is the Production of Consent in the Management of Culture." *Issues of Censorship.* Toronto: A Space, 1985. 15–19.
- Selections from *Winter Epigrams and Epigrams for Ernesto Cardenal in Defense of Claudia* appear in *Other Voices: Writings by Blacks in Canada.* Ed. Lorris Elliot. Toronto: Williams-Wallace, 1985. All excerpts are drawn from *Winter Epigrams* and include Epigrams 4, 9, 17–19, 26, 27, 33, 34, 37, 46, and 54 (13–16); "Amelia" (17–18) is also included.

1986

- Co-founded and edited *Our Lives*, the first Black women's newspaper in Canada.
- Co-edited *Fireweed* 23, Canadian Women Poets Issue, with Pamela Godfree. Includes an editorial (5).
- Co-edited, with Krisantha Sri Bhaggiyadatta, *Rivers Have Sources, Trees Have Roots: Speaking of Racism*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1986. Includes an introduction by the authors (1–6), as well as section prefaces: "The Culture of Everyday" (8), "Childhood" (52–53), "Work" (107–09), "Rivers Have Sources, Trees Have Roots" (154), and "Continuing the Fight" (190–92).
- "Stripped to Skin and Sex." Rev. of Claire Harris, *Translation into Fiction* and *Fables from the Women's Quarters*. *Canadian Woman Studies/Les Cahiers de la Femme* 7 (1986) : 222–24.
- A brief excerpt from *Winter Epigrams and Epigrams for Ernesto Cardenal in Defense of Claudia*—Epigram 35, "Ars Poetica III"—and *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun*—from "Military Occupations"—appear in *The Penguin Book of Caribbean Verse in English*. Ed. Paula Burnett. Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1986. 356; 357–362.

1987

- "Black Women and Work: The Impact of Racially Constructed Gender Roles and the Sexual Division of Labour." Part one. *Fireweed* 25 (Fall 1987) : 28–37.

1988

- "Black Women and Work: The Impact of Racially Constructed Gender Roles on the Sexual Division of Labour." Part two. *Fireweed* 26 (Winter/Spring 1988) : 87–92.
- Co-authored, with Linda Carty, "Defining World Feminism: If this is Global, Where the Hell Are We?" Rev. of Robin Morgan, *Sisterhood is Global: The International Women's Movement Anthology. Fuse Magazine* (Fall 1985) : 42–44.
- Co-authored, with Linda Carty, "'Visible Minority' Women: A Creation of the Canadian State." *Resources for Feminist Study* 17.3 (September 1988) : 39–42.
- Co-authored, with Claire Preito, "Women at the Well: A Film Series." Initial series proposal. 24 August. Office national du film du Canada – National Film Board of Canada. N.p.; n.p., 24 August 1988.

1989

- Graduated with an M.A. in Philosophy from the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE).
- "Bread Out of Stone." *Language in Her Eye: Views on Writing and Gender by Canadian Women Writing in English.* Eds. Libby Shreier, Sarah Sheard, and Eleanor Wachtel. Toronto: Coach House, 1990, 45–53.
- Was associate director, with director Claire Preito, of *Older Stronger Wiser*. Women at the Well Series. National Film Board of Canada, Studio D, 1989.
- *Sans Souci and Other Stories.* Toronto: Women's P, 1989.
- Poems from *Chronicles of the Hostile Sun* appear in *Poetry by Canadian Women.* Ed. Rosemary Sullivan. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1989. They are

"Amelia" (270–71), "Amelia continued" (271–72), and "Diary—The grenada crisis" (272–75).

- A very tetchy excerpt from Brand's short story "Photograph" can be found in *Her True-true Name: An Anthology of Women's Writing From the Caribbean*. Eds. Pamela Mordecai and Betty Wilson. London: Heinemann, 1989. 179–82.

1990

- Writer-in-residence at the University of Toronto, until 1991.
- "Interview by Dagmar Novak." *Other Solitudes: Canadian Multicultural Fictions*. Eds. Linda Hutcheon and Marion Richmond. Toronto: Oxford UP, 1990. 271–77. This interview is accompanied by Brand's short story "Blossom: Priestess of Oya, Goddess of Winds, Storms, and Waterfalls" (263–71).
- "An Interview with Dionne Brand, Associate Director and Ginny Stikeman, Producer/Editor of *Older Stronger Wiser*." Canada. National Film Board of Canada, Studio D. Montréal: n.p., [Jan. 1990*].
- "The Language of Resistance." Interview with Beverly Daurio. *Books in Canada* (October 1990) : 13–16.
- *No Language Is Neutral*. Toronto: Coach House, 1990. Nominated for the Governor General's Award for Poetry in English and for the Trillium Book Prize (1990).
- "Women at the Well Series: Film Proposal No. 2." Proposal. Working title: "Sisters in the Struggle: Black Women Fighting Racism and Sexism." Office national du film du Canada – National Film Board of Canada. [1990*]

- Written by Barbara Mitchell, "Two New Films—*Older Stronger Wiser* and *Black Mother Black Daughter*—Premiere During Black History Month." News Release. Montreal: National Film Board, 12 January 1990.
- Brand's short story "Photograph" appears in *From Ink Lake: Canadian Stories*. Ed. Michael Ondaatje. Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1990. 485–504.

1991

- Toured England, Scotland, and the Netherlands to give public readings. Also toured South Africa as a member of the The New Nation Writers' Conference, a celebration of Nelson Mandela's release from prison, sponsored by the independent, weekly newspaper *The New Nation*.
- Held a tenure-track position and taught creative writing at the University of Guelph, until 1992.
- *Sisters in the Struggle*. Co-directed with Ginny Stikeman. Women at the Well Series. National Film Board of Canada, 1991.
- *No Burden to Carry: Narratives of Black Working Women in Ontario 1920s to 1950s*. Toronto: Women's, 1991. Includes an introductory essay, "No Burden to Carry" (11–36). Completed with the assistance of Lois De Sheild, and the Immigrant Women's Job Placement Centre in Toronto.
- "Women at the Well Series: Film Proposal No. 3." Proposal. Working title: "Batari Blues." Office national du film du Canada – National Film Board of Canada. [1991*]

1992

- Taught in the English Department at the University of Guelph, until 1994.

1993

- "Who Can Speak for Whom?" appeared in *Brick* 46 (Summer 1993) : 13–20.
- Directed by Brand, *Long Time Comin'*. Women at the Well Series. National Film Board of Canada. 1993.
- "*Long Time Comin'*: An Interview with Director Dionne Brand." National Film Board of Canada, Studio D. Montréal: n.p., [Sept. 1993*]
- "*Long Time Comin'*: Dionne Brand—Director's Biography." National Film Board of Canada. Sept. 1993.
- "Notes for Writing thru Race" delivered at the Writing Thru Race Conference in Vancouver (June).
- "Owning the Language." Interview with Lynne Wanyeki, Nikola Maria De Marin, and Charmaine Perkins. *Kinesis* (Oct. 1993) : 20–21.
- "Just Rain, Bacolet" appeared in *Writing Away*, McClelland & Stewart, 1994.

1994

- "Adrienne Rich and Dionne Brand: In this Conversation for Life." Proposal. Office national du film du Canada – National Film Board of Canada. N.p.: n.p., 15 Sept. 1994.
- *Bread Out of Stone: Recollections on Sex, Recognitions, Race, Dreaming, and Politics*. Toronto: Coach House P, 1994.
- Co-authored, with Peggy Bristow, Linda Carty, Afua P. Cooper, Sylvia Hamilton, and Adrienne Shadd, *"We're Rooted Here and They Can't Pull Us Up": Essays in African Canadian Women's History*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1994. Includes an introduction (3–12), as well as Brand's essay

"'We weren't allowed to go into factory work until Hitler started the war': The 1920s to the 1940s" (171–91).

1995

- "Brandishing a Powerful Pen." Interview with Charmaine Perkins and Sandra McPherson. *Kinesis* (June 1995): 16–17.
- "In the Company of My Work." Interview with Makeda Silvera. *The Other Woman: Women of Colour in Contemporary Canadian Literature*. Makeda Silvera, ed. Toronto: Sister Vision P, 1995. 356–80.
- Brand's short story "Photograph" reappears in this reissue of *From Ink Lake: Canadian Stories*. Ed. Michael Ondaatje. Toronto: Vintage, 1995. 485–504.

1996

- "Jazz," delivered at the Guelph Jazz Festival.
- "Arriving at Desire." *Desire in Seven Voices*. Ed. Lorna Crozier. Vancouver: Douglas and McIntyre, 1996. 125–42.
- *In Another Place, Not Here*. 1996. Toronto: Vintage Canada, 1997. This novel was shortlisted for the Trillium Book Award (1996), as well as for the Chapters/Books in Canada First Novel Award (1996).
- *Listening for Something...Adrienne Rich and Dionne Brand in Conversation.* Talking Women Series. National Film Board of Canada, Studio D. 1996.

1997

- "Dualities." *Brick* 58 (Winter 1998) : 4–8.); delivered as an address at OISE North York Conference on Education.
- "Imagination, Representation and Culture," delivered at York University Conference on Multiculturalism. Also Broadcast on CBC's "This Morning" (Fall).
- *Land to Light On.* Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1997. This volume won the Governor General's Award for Poetry in English (1997), and the Trillium Award for Poetry (1997).
- "Unredeemed Grace: Eva Tihanyi Speaks with Dionne Brand." *Books in Canada* 26.2 (March 1997) : 8–9.
- Selections of Brand's works are included in *Eyeing the North Star: Directions in African-Canadian Literature.* Ed. George Elliot Clarke. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1997. These selections include "Winter Epigram # 4" (122), "I am not that strong woman" (122–23), an excerpt from "Hard Against the Soul" (124–25), and the essay "Just Rain, Bacolet" (125–34).
- The short story "No Rinsed Blue Sky, No Red Flower Fences" is included in *The Penguin Anthology of Stories by Canadian Women.* Ed. Denise Chong. Toronto: Viking, 1997. 244–52.

1998

- Was a visiting writer at the University of Calgary in the Markin-Flanagan Distinguished Writers Programme.
- "Black Women and Work: The Impact of Racially Constructed Gender Roles on the Sexual Division of Labour." Part two. *Fireweed* 26 (Winter/Spring 1988) : 87–92.

- *Bread Out of Stone: Recollections on Sex, Recognitions, Race, Dreaming, and Politics*. 1994. Rev. ed. Toronto: Vintage Canada, 1998.
- "Writing It." Interview with Beverly Daurio. *The Power to Bend Spoons: Interviews with Canadian Novelists*. Ed. Beverly Daurio. Toronto: The Mercury P, 1998. 31–41.

1999

- Was a lecturer at the University of British Columbia.
- Lectured at York University*.
- *At the Full and Change of the Moon*. 1999. Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2000.
- "Dionne's Brand of Writing." Interview with Abbas Nuzhat. *Herizons* 13.3 (Fall 1999) : 18–22.
- The short story "Photograph" is included in *The Oxford Book of Stories by Canadian Women in English*. Ed. Rosemary Sullivan. Don Mills, ON: Oxford UP, 1999. 494–509.

2000

- Was the Ruth Wynn Woodward Professor in the Department of Women's Studies at Simon Fraser University, until 2002.
- Was a candidate for the writer-in-residence position at Amherst College in 2000–2001.
- "At the Full and Change of CanLit: An Interview with Dionne Brand." Interview with Rinaldo Walcott and Leslie Sanders. *Canadian Woman Studies* 20.2 (Summer 2000) : 22–26.

2001

- Moderated The Ruth Wynn Woodward Professor Writer's Series, which included readings by Nicole Brossard (20 Sept.), Brand herself (18 Oct.), and Anita Rau Badami (15 Nov.).
- *A Map to the Door of No Return: Notes to Belonging*. Canada: Doubleday Canada, 2001.

2002

- *Thirsty*. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2002.

Additional publications

- Brand has also edited, and written and done research for a variety of alternative journals and papers. These include: *Spear*, *Network*, the *Harriet Tubman Review*, and *Canadian Women's Studies*.

Positions of social activism and volunteer work

- Chaired the Women's Issues Committee of the Ontario Coalition of Black Trade Unionists, of which she was a founding member [1986*].
- Helped organize the Black and Native Women's Caucus of the International Women's Day Coalition.
- In Toronto, a counsellor for the Black West Indian community at the Immigrant Women's Centre, and for the Black Youth Hotline.
- Community worker in Toronto for the Black Education Project.
- Served on the Board of the Shirley Samaroo House, a shelter for battered immigrant women.

- Chaired the Ontario Federation of Labour (OFL) Women's Committee, the OFL Workers of Colour Conference, and the Metro Labour Anti-Racism Conference.[1]
- In the late 1970s, joined the Communist Party.

Additional teaching positions and affiliations

- Served as writer-in-residence at the Halifax City Regional Library, prior to 1991*.
- Taught poetry at the West Coast Women and Words Society Summer School and Retreat, and at Humber School of Writing in Toronto.
- Taught creative writing at York University*.
- In the mid-1990s*, worked on a Ph.D. in Women's History at OISE, but chose to leave the programme. Brand discusses the process that led to her decision in "Dualities," in *Brick* 58 (Winter 1998) : 4–8.

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[1] I was unable to confirm this work with the Ontario Federation of Labour.